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Histories of Postwar Architecture

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vol. VI

## Architecture: War and Peace

edited by

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# The Cult of Fallen Soldiers. German Cemeteries and Memorials of the First World War in Italy, 1935-1943

*First World War Memorials, Italy, Germany, Architecture, Landscape Design*

## /Abstract

A little more than ten years after the end of the First World War, the scenario of devastation of the battlefields of the Western Front appears almost unrecognizable, regenerated by nature and the work of men. But thousands of cemeteries hold the bodies of fallen soldiers, unconcealable scars of the wounds of the first “war of materials” of the contemporary age.

In Germany the construction of military cemeteries outside national borders is the work of an organization, the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (“German People’s Association for the Care of War Burials”), founded in 1919 in Berlin. German cemeteries are designed with “natural material”, to create “a strip of native soil in a foreign land”. They are simple and austere, to express the seriousness of the word “front”. Individual graves are grouped together to “form a whole” and a symbolic role is assigned to the collective burial area (Sammelgrab, later Kameradengrab), always in close relation to the “space of honor” (Ehrenraum). The memory of the individual fallen is annulled in “sanctuaries built not for the consolation of families, but for the loyalty and elevation of the Nation”. This condition of the “anonymous soldier”, a hero “without personality or individuality [...] son of the earth whose destiny is to fertilize Mother Earth”, is finally stoned in the “castles of the dead” (Totenburgen): in them the “community of the nameless” rests in a single burial ground, in “immortal landscapes” consecrated by battles.

In this perspective, we can consider the constructive program launched by the VDK at the end of 1935 in Italy, on the Isonzo, Tagliamento, Piave and Dolomite passes. The cemetery of Feltre (1936-37), the Ehrenmales of Quero and Tolmin (1936-37), the Totenburgen of Pordoi and Pinzano (both started in 1938 in a pan-Germanic perspective, the first completed in 1959, the second remained unfinished), are conceived as sentinels of an “eternal guard”, consisting of a ring of similar monuments placed in a crown around the German Reich.

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Among his publications: *Guida ai padiglioni della Biennale di Venezia dal 1887* (Electa 1988, 2014, 2022); *Guida all'architettura italiana del Novecento* (Electa 1991, 2004, with S. Polano); *Le macchine volanti di Corradino D'Ascanio* (Electa 1999, with A. Bassi); *Luigi Moretti. Opere e scritti* (Electa 2000; Princeton Architectural Press 2002, with F. Bucci); *Giuseppe Vaccaro* (Electa 2002); *Massimo e Gabriella Carmassi* (Electa 2004); *Francesco Mansutti e Gino Miozzo. Architetture per la gioventù* (MART-Skira 2005); *Case del ballilla. Architettura e fascismo* (Electa 2008, with R. Capomolla e R. Vittorini); *Ipostudio. La concretezza della modernità* (Electa 2008); *Architettura e paesaggio costruito. Palerm & Tabares de Nava* (Electa 2010); *Werner Tscholl. Architetture / Architekturen* (Electa 2013); *L'Ospedale degli Innocenti di Firenze. La fabbrica brunelleschiana, gli Innocenti dal Quattrocento al Novecento, il nuovo museo* (Electa 2016); *La foresta che cammina. Le sepolture dei soldati tedeschi 1920 1970* (Electa 2020); *Moretti, el Barroco, Caravaggio* (Mudito & Co. 2021); *Abtei Marienberg / Abbazia Montemaria. Monte Maria, la storia. Werner Tscholl, la rivitalizzazione* (Electa 2021); *Arte e architettura. Il Laboratorio Morseletto dal 1920* (Electa 2023, with E. Pegorin).

## Photo References

Courtesy of Ufficio per la Tutela della Cultura e della Memoria della Difesa, Ministero della Difesa, Roma, IT: Fig. 50, 55, 56, 57.

Courtesy of Pietro Gerometta, Vito d'Asio, Pordenone, IT: Fig. 54.

All other images are from the magazine *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* and courtesy of Archiv Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., Kassel, DE.

On the first day of meetings of the German-Italian Committee for War Graves and Memorials (Deutsch-Italienischer Ausschuss für die Amtliche Kriegsgräberfürsorge), which met in Vienna between 10 and 15 February 1943, General Augusto Grassi put on the agenda “a delicate question of great moral importance for Italians”. Following the agreements established in 1936 between the two countries – General Grassi argues – the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge had asked and obtained to arrange “dignified burials” for about 3,200 German soldiers who fell in Italy; however, and “inexplicably”, the VDK has built “five magnificent monuments”, at least three of which are in places that “remind us Italians of painful military events”. In fact: “Tolmin represents the monument to the German-Austrian victory of November 1917; Pinzano that of the breakthrough of the Tagliamento line; Quero that of the possible German-Austrian occupation of the bank of the Piave”. Only Feltre and Pordoi do not seem to imply “hostile meanings towards Italy”, even if the latter “is more than a monument, it is a real fortress”<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to those discussed in Vienna, the Totenburgen Deutscher Helden, the “castles of the dead” dedicated to the “German heroes” erected in the second half of the 1930s in various places in Eastern Europe, are not a few or without “hostile significance”. Among the main ones: in Silesia in Annaberg (today Gora Swietej Anny, Poland) and in Waldenburg (today Walbrzych, Poland), in Romania in Petrisoru, in Yugoslavia in Semendria (today Smeredevo, Serbia), Gradsko am Vardar and Bitolj (today Bitola, Macedonia). Real fortresses that, together with the Ehrenmale, the “memorials” built in numerous military cemeteries in France and Belgium, constitute an “ewige Wache”, an “eternal guard” that surrounds the new German Reich<sup>2</sup>.

The Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, the German People’s Association for the Care of War Burials, founded in Berlin on 16 December 1919<sup>3</sup>, commissioned and at the same time was the creator of these and numerous other works devoted to the “cult of fallen German soldiers”. At the end of the Great War, the military losses suffered by Germany amounted to about two million soldiers<sup>4</sup>: two hundred thousand were buried on national territory, one million in France and Belgium, over half a million on the Baltic, Russian and Polish fronts,

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1 General Grassi lays out possible “remedial solutions” suggested by the head of the Italian government. The Pinzano memorial – almost completed but not yet in use – could be donated to Italy to “honor its sons”, who fell to defend that front in 1917; or become a burial place for German and Italian soldiers who perished fighting “shoulder to shoulder, with a spirit of sacrifice” in the ongoing war. The report of proceedings, *Österreichische Kriegsgräber in Italien*, in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amtes (PAAA), copy in Volksbund Archiv, Kassel (VA), R. 1-297. This essay constitutes an in-depth analysis of the text “La guardia eterna”. *Cimiteri e memoriali del Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge in Italia, 1936-1943*, in Maria Grazia D’Amelio, ed., *Per non dimenticare. Sacrali del Novecento*, Rome 2019, 61-75 (proceedings of the International Conference held in 2016 at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome).

2 W.C. Gomoll, “Die ewige Wache. Der ring deutscher Ehrenmale rings um das Reich. IV. Italien”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 11 (1940): 154-158.

3 Bernd Ulrich, Christian Fuhrmeister, Manfred Hettling, Wolfgang Kruse, *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge. Entwicklungslinien und Probleme*, Berlin-Brandenburg 2019, 55. The volume is a fundamental reference for the history of the VDK, from its foundation to the present day.

4 Heeres-Sanitätsinspektion im Reichskriegsministeriums, *Sanitätsbericht über das deutsche Heer, (deutsches Feld- und Besatzungsheer), im Weltkriege 1914-1918*, Berlin 1934, vol. 3, 12-14. According to other sources, the number is overestimated: the British War Office indicates, for example, German losses in 1922 at 1,808,545 men.



several tens of thousands in the other theaters of war – Italy, the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, the Middle East, Africa, Japan – and in the colonies<sup>5</sup>. The Treaty of Versailles (June 28, 1919) prevented Germany – even if it had had the means – from directly dealing with military burials outside its borders, attributing this task to each Nation in whose territory the fallen were buried<sup>6</sup>. The limited possibilities of action of the government motivate the birth of associations of private citizens for the “care of war graves”. In the case of the VDK, the initiative was due to a group of officials of the Military Administration, among whom Siegfried Emmo Eulen, who inspired and led the Volksbund until 1945, stands out<sup>7</sup>. Its vision was ambitious: to create an organization capable of operating on a large scale, in cooperation with government structures but independent of them and with strong popular support. The “memorandum” prior to the founding congress (November 26, 1919) calls on the German people to mobilize to help the State face up to a “huge task.” In addition to the army of the sick and maimed, prisoners, refugees, and displaced persons, the unemployed without means of support, there is an “army of the dead numbering millions of people”; and the tombs, “abandoned in a foreign land” and at risk of destruction. “Even the dead have a right,” reads the concluding lines of the document: it is a duty “to take care of the

<sup>5</sup> In 1929 the VDK lists 13,000 German military cemeteries in 38 countries. In 1932 the Zentralnachweiseamt für Kriegsverluste und Kriegergräber (Central Office for the Documentation of the Missing and War Burials) under the Ministry of the Interior, established on 1 October 1919, estimated a total number of 34,000 soldiers' cemeteries: Simon Rietz, *Deutsche Soldatenfriedhöfe des Ersten Weltkrieges und der Weimarer Republik. Ein Beitrag zur Professionsgeschichte der Landschaftsarchitektur* (PhD diss., Leibniz Universität Hannover, 2015), 24. <http://edok01.tib.uni-hannover.de/edoks/e01dh15/841205302.pdf> (last accessed November 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Part VI of the Treaty – “Prisoners of War and Burials” – commits Governments (Article 225) to “respect and maintain the burials of soldiers and sailors buried in their respective territories” and “to recognize any Commission appointed by one or other of the Allied and Associated Governments, to identify, register, maintain or construct suitable monuments on such burials and to facilitate the performance of this Commission in the performance of its duties”; Article 226 undertakes to provide each other with the complete list of deaths and information useful for identification; the indications, number and location of the graves of the unidentified dead.

<sup>7</sup> Siegfried Emmo Eulen (1890-1945) was Kriegsgräberverwaltung Offizier (official in charge of war graves) in Poland, Galicia, and Palestine during the First World War. He was president of the Volksbund from 1933 and from 1939 he took part in the Second World War, at the end of which he died from a wound.

Fig. 1

The graves of German soldiers outside the national borders in a graphic representation of the VDK, 1930.



burials that, everywhere, bear witness to heroic sacrifices"<sup>8</sup>. [Fig. 1]

The VDK is supported by public figures<sup>9</sup> and its governing bodies include members of the Liberal and Social Democratic parties. Soon, however, the nationalist inspiration impressed by the founders became the dominant feature of the organization: the VDK would claim a sort of moral primacy to its work, based on the inseparable link between the task of honoring the "sacrifice of the heroes" of the war and the redemption of the Nation.

The widespread German rejection of the infamous "treaty of guilt"<sup>10</sup> at Versailles includes provisions regulating the burials of soldiers. There is no shortage of propaganda topics for the VDK: the state of neglect of German cemeteries abroad; frustration at the failure to reach an agreement in 1921 between Germany, Belgium and France on the sharing of the costs of building and maintaining cemeteries<sup>11</sup>; finally, the decision of the Belgian and French governments to proceed, from 1922, to a drastic reduction in the number of German military cemeteries in their respective territories, with the consequent obliteration of ar-

8 The document is published in Rietz, *Deutsche Soldatenfriedhöfe*, 600.

9 Among the 92 subscribers of the *Aufruf*, the "appeal" of the first months of 1920, include Konrad Adenauer, Erwin Barth, Peter Behrens, German Bestelmeyer Richard Dehmel, Bishop Otto Dibelius, Martin Elsaesser, Archbishop Michael von Faulhaber, Gerhard Hauptmann, General Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, Hermann Hosaeus, Wilhelm Kreis, Max Liebermann, Franz von Mendelssohn, Max Pechstein, Bruno Paul, Hans Poelzig, Walther Rathenau, the evangelical pastor Fritz Siems, Fritz Schumacher, Vice-Admiral Adolf von Trotha, Rabbi Samson Weiße. The sheet is reproduced in Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., ed., *Dienst am Menschen. Dienst am Frieden*, Kassel, 2001, 19.

10 Article 231 of Part VIII, "Reparations", provides "... the responsibility of Germany and her allies, for having been the cause, for all losses and damages suffered by the Allies and the Associated Governments in consequence of the war imposed on them by the aggression of Germany and her allies."

11 The problem is the disproportion in the number of soldiers killed and buried in different countries. While Britain is making agreements with France and Belgium to cover the costs of building its own military cemeteries, Germany is invoking Articles 225 and 226 of the Treaty because it is unable to meet the costs of building or repatriating the bodies. Aimed at affirming the principle of "reciprocity" is the law on the preservation of war graves in Germany voted by the German parliament on December 29, 1922.

Fig. 2

The German military cemetery "La Maison Blanche" in Neuville Saint-Vaast, France, 1929.1930.



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tefacts considered “of historical and artistic value” and, above all, the definitive impossibility of assigning an identity to several thousand soldiers. The outrage is joined by criticism of the new cemeteries, some of which appear as real “cities of the dead”, with tens of thousands of crosses in a barren landscape: “naked and soulless” places, alien to German ways of honoring the fallen<sup>12</sup>. [Fig. 2]

After being recognized in 1921 as the government’s sole interlocutor in the care of war graves<sup>13</sup>, in 1922 the VDK obtained the involvement of the German parliament in the celebration of the Volkstrauertag, the “day of popular mourning” dedicated to soldiers who died in war<sup>14</sup>. Since 1921 a monthly bulletin has been published, the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge. Mitteilungen und Berichte vom Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*: the first issue features a photograph of a cemetery on the Eastern Front, the “Vier-Grenadier-Grab” in Grabowiec (Poland) – an image transformed in 1926 by the artist Ernst Böhm into the pictogram with the five distinctive crosses of the VDK insignia<sup>15</sup>. [Fig. 3, 4] The bulletin is a fundamental tool for the growth of the association and its rooting in every social stratum of the population. The results are eloquent: from 1920 to 1930 the individual members of the Volksbund grew from 9,849 to 138,044 and the “local groups” from 177 to 1,439, while the circulation of the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* increased from the initial 7,000 to over 51,000 copies. The VDK also counts 5,197 guilds and 13,266 German cities and municipalities among its members; finally, it benefited from the donations of 376 Paten (godfathers) who between 1926 and

12 In 1922-24 the number of German cemeteries in France was reduced from about 3,900 to 210; among the structures resulting from this merger are Neuville-Saint-Vaast (“La Maison Blanche”) and Saint-Laurent-Blangy, with 40,000 and 22,000 burials respectively; Rietz, *Deutsche Soldatenfriedhöfe*, 442.

13 The decree of the Ministry of the Interior (October 1921) regulating the cooperation between ZAK and VDK is published in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.11 (1921)82-83.

14 The Volkstrauertag, “day of national mourning”, was transformed in 1934 by the Nazi regime into Heldengedenktag, “day of remembrance of heroes”.

15 The mound with five crosses contains the bodies of four grenadiers and an officer (the highest cross) killed in action.

Fig. 3

Cover of the first issue of the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* bulletin with the image of the Vier-Grenadier-Grab in Grabowiec (Poland) set up in autumn 1918.

Fig. 4

Pictogram by Ernst Böhm for the insignia of the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge.

1930 supported works in military cemeteries with over a million Reichsmarks. In the six-year period 1925-1930 the expenses allocated to the arrangement of cemeteries rose from 57% to 85% of the total resources of the association, growing in absolute terms from 24,000 to 570,000 Reichsmarks<sup>16</sup>.

The construction activity of the VDK intensified from 1926, the year of the agreements that allowed Germany to deal directly with its war cemeteries in Belgium and France. In June 1926, Siegfried Emmo Eulen created a VDK Construction Office (Baubüro) in Munich and entrusted its technical responsibility to Robert Tischler, Gartenarchitekt in the Bavarian city since 1920<sup>17</sup>. The VDK's programme for the development of military cemeteries in France was announced in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* of August 1926 and documented in the following years with the publication of numerous projects in the regions of the former Western Front, from Pas-de-Calais to Rhône-Alpes. In May 1930, out of about 200 planned cemeteries in France, 80 were listed as "designed down to detail", 62 under construction, 12 completed. In Belgium, where the Amtlicher Deutscher Gräberdienst operates<sup>18</sup>, the VDK built only two cemeteries in these years: in Roeselare-De Ruyter (1928-30) and in Langemark (1929-32) – a work, the latter, of great symbolic importance and decisive in clarifying the meaning attributed by the Volksbund at the end of the twenties to the "cult of fallen soldiers".

The projects drawn up by Baubüro directed by Tischler necessarily take as a reference the ministerial "guidelines" for military cemeteries drawn up during the war<sup>19</sup>. However, they are interpreted and "refined" by accentuating the role of certain elements – in particular, the area of collective burial (Sammelgrab) – and by introducing new ones, the most important of which is the "space of honour" (Ehrenraum). The cemetery enclosure is protected by dense hedges and rows of trees and sturdy walls. Beyond the narrow entrance – which allows the passage of one person at a time – there is sometimes a "tree-lined vestibule". The main path, paved but not wide, leads to the Sammelgrab, clearly distinguished from the individual tombs, arranged in compact and regular rows, and marked by wooden crosses (destined to be replaced by stone crosses). The collective burial tomb is defined by a low curb and always connected to the Ehrenraum, often surrounded by trees, and marked by a stele, an altar or a cross.

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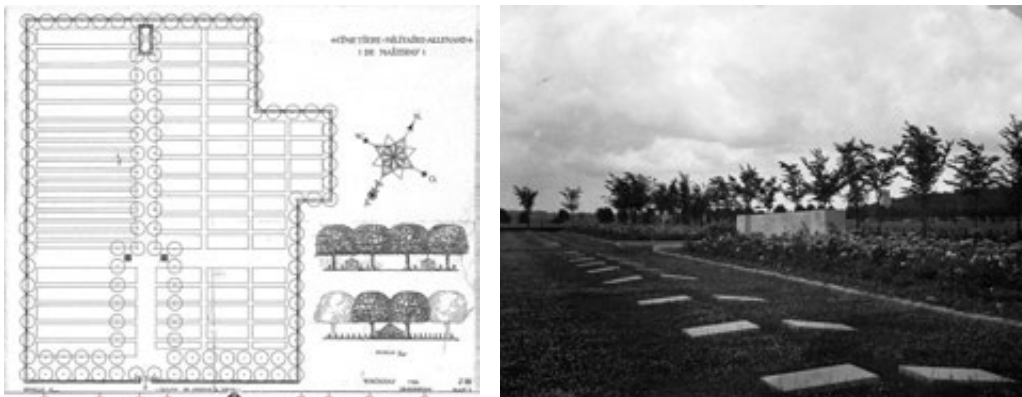
16 *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.10 (1929): 6, 1931. The numbers were destined to grow in the following decade: individual members were 151,110 in 1934, 295,000 in 1936, 537,000 in 1940, 993,572 in 1943.

17 The biography of Robert Tischler (1885-1959) is meagre due to the loss, after his death, of his personal and professional archive. It is known his apprenticeship at the Munich Botanical Garden and his attendance in 1903-04 at the Staatliche Lehranstalt für Obst- und Gartenbau (Proskau, Silesia); his work as a garden designer is documented until 1931. From 1926 to 1959 he oversaw Baubüro, then Bauleitung, of the VDK. To his "design direction" is ascribed most of the military cemeteries and memorials built by the VDK in this period; Fritz Debus, "Robert Tischler zum Gedenken", *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 5 (1959): 67; Hans Soltau, "Zum 100. Geburtstag von Robert Tischler", *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.4 (1985): 20-21. A first critical reading is by Meinhold Lurz, "... ein Stück Heimat in Fremder Erde. Die Heldenhaine und Totenburgen des Volksbunds Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge", *Arch plus: Zeitschrift für Architektur und Städtebau*, no.71 (1983): 66-70. A biographical reconstruction is by Christian Fuhrmeister, "Robert Tischler, Chefarchitekt 1926-1959. Ein Desiderat", *RiHA Journal*, 0159, 27 June 2017 (<http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2017/0150-0176-special-issue-war-graves/0159-fuhrmeister>, last accessed November 2024).

18 Established on 1 April 1923, the Amtlicher Deutscher Gräberdienst (Official German Burial Service) reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and has responsibility for military cemeteries abroad.

19 Monica Kuberek, "Die Kriegsgräberstätten des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge", in *Unglücklich das Land, das Helden nötig hat: Leiden und Sterben in den Kriegsdenkmäler des Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. Michel Hütt, Hans-Joachim Kunst, Florian Matzner, Ingeborg Pabst (Marburg 1990), 75-90.

The essential order of the composition corresponds to the craftsmanship of the materials – the rough stone, the wrought iron of the gates, the oak wood of the crosses – and a judicious use of vegetation. In the first cemeteries, traditional German plants, such as oaks and lime trees, are preferred (but not exclusively), along with hedges of wild roses, sycamore, or beech for the fences. Collective burials are covered with periwinkle or lavender cloaks and individual graves with heather, while unpaved paths are sown with clover<sup>20</sup>. [Fig. 5, 6, 7, 8] Hans Rose identifies the VDK cemeteries as “typical solutions that have their basis in the personal vision of Robert Tischler”. The collective burials, in subdued interaction with the entrance, “form the heart and focal point of the plant”, while the individual tombs “are not circumscribed” or in evidence, because only in its entirety can the surface of the ground be “artistically organized”<sup>21</sup>. Franz Hallbaum wrote even more explicitly a few years later that “if the word ‘front’ has any meaning in the design of war cemeteries”, its character, simplicity and seriousness must resonate in the landscape and in the tombs, united to form “a totality”<sup>22</sup>.



5 - 6

From the early 1930s onwards, the character of the German Soldatenfriedhöfe was fervently claimed in VDK publications. The military cemeteries of other nations are criticized for their excessive monumentality, judged “bombastic” in form, “pretentious” for the ostentation of the materials, “superficial” and “pathetic”<sup>23</sup> for the attempt to soften with the variety of colors of flowers the grave solemnity of the places that should honor the sacrifice of the fallen for the Fatherland. On the contrary, German cemeteries – in terms of the organization of space and the choice of “simple and austere” vegetation, the attention to the craftsmanship of the details, the shape and color of the crosses – emanate, in Hallbaum’s words, “a deeper calm and seriousness than those of England and France.” And, in their tendency to “typify”, “a repeated solution will never be found,

20 Detailed descriptions accompany the images of drawings, models, and creations of the Soldatenfriedhöfe in the magazine.

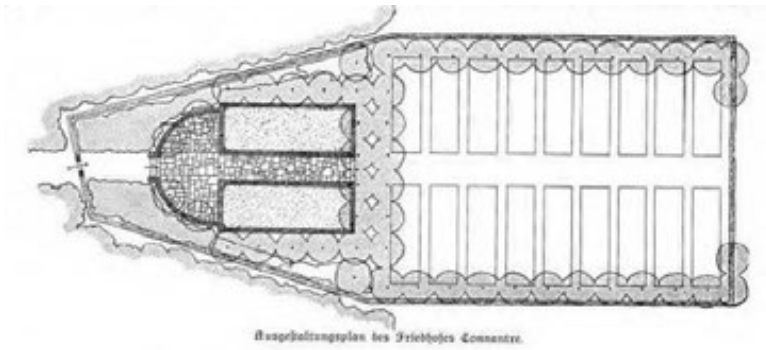
21 Hans Rose, “Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge”, *Die Gartenkunst*, no. 5 (1930): 83-86; Rose points out that the architect does not satisfy a personal taste but interprets the theme in ways appropriate to a general feeling. A pupil of Heinrich Wölfflin, Rose was Professor of Art History at the University of Munich from 1921 to 1931.

22 Franz Hallbaum, “Die deutsche Kriegsgräberstätte, ihr Wesen und ihre Form”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 10 (1932): 146-148. Hallbaum was a pupil of Hans Rose at the University of Munich; from 1930 to 1932 he was director of the DGfG and of the journal *Die Gartenkunst*; he was head of communications for the VDK from 1933 and editor of the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* until his death in 1939.

23 Reinhold Lingner, “Kriegerfriedhöfe”, *Die Gartenkunst*, no.10 (1930): 173-175.

Fig. 5  
Project for the arrangement of the military cemetery of Maizeray (Maizières-lès-Metz), France, 1928.

Fig. 6  
Bellau military cemetery, France, 1930.



never will one cemetery resemble another, in terms of location, size, character of the landscape<sup>24</sup>, since “we Germans, unlike other peoples, design our cemeteries mainly with natural material”. The aim is to create a natural atmosphere in the places where the soldiers are commemorated, because “in the shadows and rustling of the treetops, the German seeks peace when he is in communion with his dead, with whom an eternal dialogue must be maintained”<sup>25</sup>. [Fig. 9, 10] From all these formulations, it is clear what the founding paradigm of these places is; and illuminating, to identify their origin, is a page by Elias Canetti in *Masse und Macht*.

“The mass symbol of the Germans was *the army*. But the army was more than an army: it was *the walking forest*. Nowhere in the world has the sense of the forest remained as alive as in Germany. The rigidity and parallelism of the upright trees, their density and number, fill the German heart with deep and secret joy. The German looks for the forest in which his ancestors lived and still likes to feel at one with the trees”<sup>26</sup>.

“Ein Stück Heimat in fremder Erde” – a strip of native soil in a foreign land – is the commentary that accompanies the images of cemeteries in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* that evoke the Heldenhaine, the woods of the ancient Germanic heroes now dedicated to soldiers, “contemporary heroes”. Nature is incorporated into German military cemeteries, which become “landscapes of memory of the Fatherland” – or rather, of “memory of war”. In them, the importance assigned to the “places of honor” – the Sammelgrab, “heart and focal point”, and the Ehrenraum – to the detriment of individual burials is a consequence of the immanent meaning attributed by the VDK to its mission: “to build sanctuaries not for the consolation of families, but for loyalty and for the elevation of the Nation”<sup>27</sup>. Consistent with this vision will be, on the one hand, the symbolic “groups of crosses” (Kreuzgruppen), placed in the camp without a direct relationship

24 Franz Hallbaum, “Gestaltung deutscher Kriegsgräberstätten. Aus der Arbeit des Volksbundes Deutscher Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.”, *Die Baugilde*, no. 3 (1934): 75-88.

25 [Max] Arendt, “Bauten des Volksbundes in ihrer geschichtlichen und kulturellen Bedeutung”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.2 (1935): 19-24 (text of a lecture of 7 December 1934 at 1. Führertag of the VDK in Kiel).

26 Elias Canetti, *Masse und Macht*, Hamburg 1960 (*Massa e potere*, Milan: Biblioteca Adelphi 1981, 206).

27 Hans Gstettner, “Kampf um ewiges Werk. Eine Weiterführung unseres aufsatzes. Was bald vergessen sein wird”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.1 (1940): 9-15. The decision to privilege the collective significance of the Soldatenfriedhöfe was ratified by the VDK as early as 1930; Rietz, *Deutsche Soldatenfriedhöfe*, 454-459.

Fig. 7, 8

The military cemetery of Connantre, France, 1928. The project for the arrangement and views of the Ehrenraum and the Sammelgräber in 1930.

with the burials but as “units of the army, called on parade, to the eternal call”<sup>28</sup>; on the other hand, the use of architecture, to give an even more precise character to the “sanctuaries” built by the Volksbund.

The architecture appears on the cover of the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* in December 1928, in a “cemetery of honor” in the district of Olita (Alytus) in Lithuania: a sort of mastaba built with boulders that seems to evoke the enduring resistance of soldiers who died fighting<sup>29</sup>. [Fig. 11] A few years later, in March 1931, a “chapel” erected in 1930 in the cemetery of Lisse near Verdun in France was published: a cylindrical stone volume, furrowed by vertical slits below the crowning frieze and equipped with a massive trilithic portal. [Fig. 12] The small memorial (Gedenkhalle) is inserted, according to Rose, in the wake of a tradition that originates with the tomb of Theodoric in Ravenna: “the noblest testimony among the burials of Germanic heroes”, even if in Lisse “it is not a tomb of kings but a tomb of the people”<sup>30</sup>. A bas-relief superimposed on the portal shows the stylized figure of an angel with the insignia of the VDK; on the interior walls, oak planks are engraved with the names of the soldiers – in Rose’s words, a “typographical masterpiece whose craftsmanship takes us back to the oldest examples of woodcuts”. The Lithuanian “fort” and the “chapel” in Lisse announce the ways in which the “care of war graves” will evolve in the work of the VDK. In the former theatres of battle in the east and south countries – in the absence of restrictive regulations by the local authorities<sup>31</sup> – and in Germany, the “fortresses of the dead” (Totenburgen) will be built. In the military cemeteries in France – already “defended” by sturdy walls, “not forty centimeters, as in the fence of a domestic garden, but one meter thick, rooted in the ground and created for eternity”<sup>32</sup> – architectures of small dimensions but no less eloquent will be built. At Romagne-sous-Montfaucon (1932-33), Rancourt (1932-33), Maissemy (1933-35), Liny-devant-Dun (1933-37), Haubourdin (1934-37) and other places, the VDK will build memorials adorned with sculptures, mosaics, blacksmith and cabinet-making works, dedicatory inscriptions, transforming soldiers’ cemeteries



9 - 10

28 Hans Gstettner, “Ehrenmale des Volkes. Die Entwicklung der Grabzeichenfrage in der Arbeit des Volksbundes”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 6/7 (1940): 76-88. The article shows models of two cemeteries in France, in Consenvoye and Origny-Sainte-Benoite, set up with groups of five and seven stone crosses, the central one larger and slightly advanced than the others.

29 The construction is not listed as a Bauleitung construction nor further documented in the bulletin and may have been a war station integrated into the cemetery.

30 Hans Rose, “Zum Volkstrauertag – 1. März 1931”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 3 (1931): 40-41. In Rose’s historiographical simplification, the election of the Ravenna mausoleum as a “Germanic testimony” is also the consequence of an instrumental interpretation of the meaning of the decorative band crowning it with the Gothic “pincer” motif.

31 The complete “design freedom” is also emphasized by Franz Hallbaum, “Die Totenburg Deutscher Helden in Bitolj, Jugoslawien”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.1 (1936): 4-13. On the other hand, the agreements with France and Belgium provide, among other constraints, for a limit of 3 meters in height for constructions in German military cemeteries, and the approval of projects by the competent authorities.

32 Arendt, “Bauten des Volksbundes...”, 20.

Fig. 9

The military cemetery of Roeselare-De Ruyter, Belgium, 1928-30. View circa 1934.

Fig. 10

“Deutsche heimat in fremder Erde”, the German military cemetery in Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, France, 1932-33. The field with the crosses in 1938.



11 - 12



13 - 14

into complete symbols of “Germanic culture”<sup>33</sup>. [Fig. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18]

In the work of Tischler’s “construction office”, the expression “Heimat in fremder Erde” takes on a new meaning. According to Hallbaum, the Munich Bauleitung restores the tradition of the old builders’ guilds (Bauhütten): a partnership of architects, artists and master craftsmen who collaborate, collectively and anonymously, “in the service of the honor of heroes”<sup>34</sup>, aspiring to the realization of a “total work of art” (Gesamtkunstwerk), an expression of the “people’s community” (Volksgemeinschaft) – an explicit will in the claim of the Volksbund as a “German People’s Federation” (Bund des Deutschen Volkes).

A paradigmatic demonstration of the service rendered “to the honour of heroes” is the “Soldatenfriedhof Langemarck” in Flanders, commissioned in 1929 from the VDK by the German Students’ Union and inaugurated on July 10, 1932<sup>35</sup>. The cemetery area (210x90 meters) is surrounded on three sides by rows of willows and divided into two parts: the burial ground, planted with oak trees, and the “space of honor” (Ehrenraum), with a moat on the outer sides. The entrance is guarded by a massive construction of reddish-orange sandstone from the Weser, the narrow passage framed by a megalithic portal. Inside, to the left of the vestibule, is the “consecrated space” (Weiheraum), covered with oak planks

Fig. 11  
Ehrenfriedhof in Olita, Lithuania, 1928.

Fig. 12  
Chapel in the military cemetery in Lisse, France, 1930.

Fig. 13, 14  
Ehrenhalle in Maissemy military cemetery, France, 1933-35. Exterior with the stainless-steel cross and bronze sarcophagus on the inside.

33 The Handwerks Kultur in the work of the VDK, in explicit antithesis to the modernism of the Neue Sachlichkeit, is a recurring theme in the writings of Hallbaum and Gstettner in *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*.

34 Dr. H. [Hallbaum], “Die Bauhütte des Volkbundes. Eine Kameradschaft deutscher Künstler und Handwerksmeister im Dienste der Heldenehrung”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 1 (1938): 4-12.

35 *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.8 (1932), is entirely devoted to Langemarck; among the many later writings, Franz Hallbaum, “Langemarck. Der Patenfriedhof der Deutschen Studentenschaft, seine Gestaltung und Bedeutung”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.5 (1933): 69-72.



15 - 16



17 - 18

bearing the names of 6,307 soldiers engraved with fire and gilded. Beyond the vestibule, on the wall of the “court of honour,” a wreath of oak leaves is surmounted by a plaque with the words: “Germany must live, even if we should die!”<sup>36</sup>. From here, a paved path between beech hedges leads to the Ehrenraum, where three concrete casemates – suitably “restored” vestiges of war – are enclosed in a sequence of altars dedicated to regiments and student associations, defining a path at the end of which you enter the burial ground. A sophisticated narrative structure links together the different places of the cemetery. [Fig. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25] The entrance is a “fortified gate” (Torbau); the Weiheraum is “consecrated” by the exposition of the soldiers’ names, united in a totality whose meaning is made explicit by the epigraph in the walled courtyard. In the “space of honour”, the outer moat evokes the opening of the Nieuwpoort dam, the cause of the halt of the German advance at the end of October 1914; the barrier formed by the casemates and altars “materializes” the resistance of the defensive front on the battlefield, sown with poppies “as red as the blood of soldiers”<sup>37</sup>. Finally, the oak forest (Eichenhain), in which crosses are almost superfluous since this place can legitimately be considered as a single collective burial ground. “Langemarck” fully stages the transfiguration of the death of the individual soldier, in himself an “insignificant victim”<sup>38</sup> whose memory is con-

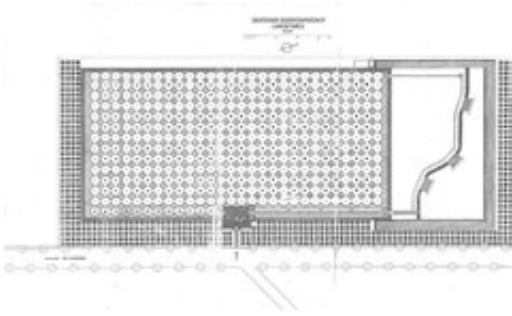
Fig. 15, 16  
Ehrenmal in Haubourdin Cemetery, France, 1934-37. Exterior view and mosaic in the interior.

Fig. 17, 18  
Ehrenmal in Liny-devant-Dun military cemetery, France, 1933-36. View of the court of honour and the Weiheraum with the dedicatory slate tables.

36 “Deutschland muß leben, und wenn wir sterben müssen!” is the recurring line of the poem *Soldatenabschied* (1914) by Heinrich Lersch.

37 Ulrich, Fuhrmeister, Hettling, Kruse, *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, 164-165.

38 “Der einzelne nichts und das Volk alles ist” [the individual is nothing and the people are everything]; Hans



19 - 20 - 21

sidered destined to fade, in the “foundational” sacrifice of the new spirit that animates the nation and which, therefore, is destined to perennial memory. It is no coincidence that such a “political truth”, which claims to indissolubly link Germany’s past, present and future, is uttered in “Langemarck”, given the pristine and constant manipulation of the aimless massacre of several thousand German soldiers that took place here in the first months of the war<sup>39</sup>.

Ernst Jünger has dedicated reflections to “Langemarck” and to the figure of the “anonymous soldier” (unbekannt) that it is appropriate to recall here. In *Der Arbeiter* (1932) Jünger writes that “the hero of this affair [the World War], the anonymous soldier, appears as the exponent of virtues active in the highest degree [...]. Its virtue lies in its substitutability and in the fact that behind every fallen soldier the changing of the guard is already ready, in reserve”<sup>40</sup>. This, precisely, is the “virtue” celebrated at “Langemarck”: “an event less significant in military history than in the history of the spirit,” where “the bearers of the idea [...] they are knocked down to the ground by matter, the mother of things [the machine gun]. But this contact with the ground is what [...] enriches them with new energies. What dies,” Jünger concludes, “what detaches from the branch and falls is the individual,” whose “visible path” the unknown soldier concludes<sup>41</sup>. As a child of the earth returning to it, the unknown soldier is “the one who fertilizes”: an “elemental energy” that frees death from its individual motivations. Even more than the fallen remembered by their names on the tombstones of war cemeteries, the unknown soldier thus becomes, to use an expression of Canetti, a “figure of growth”: for this reason, in the cemeteries built by Tischler for the VDK “the

Gstettner, *Deutsche Soldatenmale. Erbaut vom Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Berlin*, Berlin [1940], 14.

39 In the months of the First Battle of Ypres (October 19 – November 22, 1914), the German High Command ordered on November 10 the attack on Langemarck (actually at Dixmude and Bixchote) on the reserve corps of the Fourth Army – new and poorly trained, consisting mainly of young volunteers. The “myth of Langemarck” – and of the students singing the national anthem during the assault on enemy positions – begins on November 11, 1914. Langemarck is remembered by Hitler in *Mein Kampf* as his “baptism of fire”; in June 1940 he visited the cemetery (an image on the cover of *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.8 (1940)). On Langemarck: George L. Mosse, *Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford 1990 (*Le guerre mondiali. Dalla tragedia al mito dei caduti*, Rome-Bari 1990, in particular chapter V. *Il culto del soldato caduto*); Karl Unruh, *Langemarck. Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Koblenz 1986); Gerd Krumeich, *Langemarck*, in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte. III*, ed. Etienne François and Hagen Schulze (München: 2001), 292-309.

40 Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1932). (*L'operaio. Dominio e forma* (Milan: Longanesi, 1984), 137).

41 Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, 99-100.

Fig. 19  
Deutscher Kriegerfriedhof  
Langemarck, Belgium, 1929-  
32. Plan with the heading  
“Studentenfriedhof”.

Fig. 20, 21  
The Torbau and the Weiheraum  
covered in oak planks engraved  
with the names of the soldiers.



meaning and shape of the individual graves had to be increasingly absorbed by the ideal center of force [of the Kameradengrab], losing their intrinsic meaning [...], to the point of removing [with the groups of symbolic crosses] all distinction from the unknown dead in the collective tombs, approaching the community of the nameless<sup>42</sup>.

On December 1, 1933, on the 15th Congress of the VDK, an exhibition summarizing the last four years of the association's activity was inaugurated in Berlin. [Fig. 26, 27] In addition to Langemark, models and drawings of new constructions for the cemeteries of Maissemy and Liny-devant-Dun in France, Feltre San Paolo and Quero in Italy, Smederevo (Semendria) in Yugoslavia are on display, among others; but above all, the plans for a memorial in Nazareth in Palestine and for the Totenburg – a term coined and used for the first time on this occasion – in Bitolj in Yugoslavia<sup>43</sup>.

Nazareth and Bitolj, presented in June 1932 in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*<sup>44</sup>, have in common the total absence of signs of individual burial. The first is a parallelepiped pierced by seven "courts of honor" (Ehrenhöfe), one of which is a "consecrated space" with a tower next to it. The second, referred to as a "totally new" type, has the appearance of a compact fortress, consisting of an Ehrenhof flanked by two buttress-towers connecting with the sturdy wall that surrounds the circular space intended for collective burial. Both projects will undergo changes in execution – particularly Bitolj, where the courtyard is transformed into a "hall of honor" (Ehrenhalle), with a granite altar in the center of the space and an eagle depicted in the ceiling mosaic. Built between 1933 and 1934<sup>45</sup>, the Totenburg Deutscher Helden in Bitolj was published in the February 1935 issue of *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* with images of a megalithic tomb in the Ahlhorn Forest near Oldenburg, the Mausoleum of Theodoric in Ravenna,



42 Gstettner, "Ehrenmale des Volkes...", 83.

43 Dr. H. [Hallbaum], "Verlauf der 15. Bundestagung des Volkbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge und Bericht über di Schau von Modellen, Bildern und Werkstücken deutscher Kriegsgräberstätten im ehemaligen Herrenhause in Berlin, 1. bis 23. Dezember 1933", *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.1 (1934): 4-11.

44 "Neue Baupläne des Volkbundes", *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.6 (1932): 82-88.

45 The *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* reports news and pictures of Bitolj in February, May, June, and November 1933. In January 1934 a detail of the mosaic with the eagle – the head turned to the right due to a mistake in the *cliché* – was on the cover of the bulletin illustrating the Berlin exhibition; in April the *Ringburg* in execution was published; in October, in a photograph from below, the construction appears to have been completed. The January 1936 issue is dedicated to Bitolj, with an essay by Eulen and an introduction by Hallbaum; The inauguration took place on 25 October and was reported in the December issue.

Fig. 22, 23, 24

The court of honor and the Ehrenraum with the pre-existing casemates on the site included in the sequence of are dedicated to the regiments.

Fig. 25

The oak forest with the burials of soldiers.



and the Frederick fortress of Castel del Monte in Apulia. These testimonies “of the great German past” are invoked as a “term of comparison” “with the work that the Volksbund is called upon to carry out”<sup>46</sup>; in particular, Castel del Monte or Lagopesole in Basilicata are to be considered not as formal references but for their value as a “settlement archetype”, expressions of dominium exercised over the territory<sup>47</sup>.

Bitolj gives imperishable memory and form to a war event – the resistance of German soldiers to enemy attacks during the offensive conducted by Entente troops in Macedonia in the autumn of 1916. The hill chosen for the construction dominates the “immortal landscape”<sup>48</sup> and the city. The “sanctuary” intended to house the remains of about 3,000 soldiers (exhumed from various cemeteries) is located there like a fortress made of granite blocks, equipped with a keep, buttresses and an enclosure protected by walls 6 meters high on the outside and over 2 meters thick. An impervious road leads to the north side of the keep, in which there is a narrow portal that can be crossed by one person at a time. Passing through the entrance, the bare room with the granite altar and the mosaic in the ceiling looks like a cozy space that prepares the passage to the Kameradengrab, a sort of *hortus conclusus* planted with juniper shrubs, protected by a wall two and a half meters high that allows only a view of the profile of the mountains and the sky. [Fig. 28, 29, 30, 31] In terms of its location in the landscape, form, and mass of the building, Bitolj proposes a new concept: no longer just “ein Stück Heimat” but a German exclave<sup>49</sup> “in a foreign land”. The fortress in Macedonia is also referred to by the local population as “Hitlers Werk”, Eulen and Tischler report to the Führer guiding him on his visit to the VDK exhibition in Dresden in June 1934; a phrase specified by Hallbaum in 1936 with the term “Hitlerburg”, meaning that “past and present are connected [because] the dead of the World War have entered the new State”<sup>50</sup>. In this sense,

46 Arendt, “Bauten des Volksbundes...”, 19.

47 Christian Fuhrmeister, “Die ‘unsterbliche Landschaft’, der Raum des Reiches und die Toten der Nation. Die Totenburgen Bitoli (1936) und Quero (1939) als strategische Memorialarchitektur”, *Kritische Berichte. Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften*, no.2 (2001): 56-70.

48 *Die unsterbliche Landschaft. Die Fronten des Weltkrieges*, Leipzig, 1935, edited by Erik Otto Volkmann, is the reference given by Hallbaum in *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 1 (1936), for the events of the Macedonian campaign.

49 Fuhrmeister, “Die ‘unsterbliche Landschaft’...”, 65.

50 Dr. Johannes von der Osten-Sacken, “Der Führer in der Ausstellung des Volkbundes”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.7 (1934): 98-100; Hallbaum, “Die Totenburg deutscher Helden in Bitolj...”, 9.

Fig. 26, 27

VDK exhibition in the former Herrenhaus, Berlin, December 1933. Models and drawings for Feltre, Nazareth, Quero, Langemark; models of inscriptions and motifs in wrought iron, photographs of doors and gates.



the Totenburgen establish a precise “correspondence” with the colossal triumphal arch, imagined by Hitler since 1925<sup>51</sup>, with the names of all the soldiers who perished in the war carved in granite: as in that distorted vision, “substance” of the Totenburgen are the fallen for Germany, celebrated as “victors in death”. Symbols – unmistakable and enduring – are therefore the foundation of the Totenburg “type”. The architectural references, as numerous as they are changeable, are considered by Tischler with great freedom, by selecting some essential features – the principles of settlement and the ways of occupying space, the elementary and potentially massive volume – from which to develop his projects. For Bitolj, the Napoleonic Fort d’Enet in La Rochelle has been indicated as possible references, but also the circular enclosure of the royal tombs in the palace of Mycenae<sup>52</sup>; in Gradsko (1934-37), the memorial seems to be based on an archaeological reconstruction of Egyptian temples, but typologically it can be traced back to Bitolj, due to the compact body of the entrance building and the burial enclosure, here rectangular in shape<sup>53</sup>. The same morphological organization, with variations in the dimensions and articulation of volumes, shapes, materials, and solutions that “set” the buildings, is found in the “German and Romanesque” Totenburg<sup>54</sup> in Petrisoru in Romania (1935-43). The meaning of the VDK’s Totenburgen does not derive from history – an important source, but from which they draw instrumentally – but from Tischler’s ability to translate im-



28 - 29 - 30 - 31

51 Albert Speer, *Erinnerungen*, Berlin 1969 (*Memorie del Terzo Reich*, Milan 1971, 1995, 90); Elias Canetti, *Hitler, nach Speer*, München 1972 (*Hitler secondo Speer*, in Id., *Potere e sopravvivenza*, (Milan: Biblioteca Adelphi, 1974), 96.

52 Respectively Fuhrmeister, “Die ‘unsterbliche Landschaft’...”, 61, and Moreno Baccichet, *Il sacrario sul Tagliamento e i Totenburgen germanici nel paesaggio italiano (1936-1943)* (Monfalcone: Edicom, 2019), 38.

53 In Gradsko, the monumental high relief placed as the “guard” of the Kameradengrab depicts two soldiers supporting and leading a wounded comrade: Wilhelm Conrad Gomoll, “Die ewige Wache. Der Ring deutscher Ehrenmale rings um das Reich. V. Balkan und Orient”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.12 (1940): 170-181.

54 In Petrisoru there are sculptures of horses on the main front and lions guarding the Kameradengrab; a “Germanic” Weiheraum with bronze altars and a “Romanesque” Gedenkhalle with frescoes.

Fig. 28, 29, 30, 31  
Bitolj’s Totenburg in Macedonia, 1932-35. Views in the landscape, the Ehrenraum and the Kameradengrab in 1938.

ages and concepts “analogically” into architectural forms and spatial sequences. The “character” sought for them is the result of an executive process that is deliberately “anti-modern” as well as carefully controlled: from the choice of materials – mainly stone, almost always but not exclusively of local origin – to the construction techniques, anachronistically primeval<sup>55</sup>. Finally, their “quality” is entirely entrusted to the decorative apparatus created by the “guild” of artists and master craftsmen of the Bauleitung of Munich, which “completes” the construction by seeking an agreement between symbols and signs in every detail, up to the choice of plant species to be planted.

What has been written so far provides adequate tools for understanding the nature of the “five magnificent monuments” built by the VDK in Italy between 1936 and 1943 – of whose plans, moreover, the Commissariato was constantly informed. Nor could General Ugo Cei, Grassi’s predecessor, who in the second half of the 1930s was a promoter of the construction of the main Italian memorials and who was present at the inaugural ceremonies of May 1939 in Quero and Tolmino, have escaped the significance of the “monuments” built by the VDK, which he himself appreciated for their “great artistic value” during the eighteenth congress of the organization in Wrocław<sup>56</sup>.

But let’s go back to the beginning of this affair. Despite the small number of German soldiers who died on the Italian front during the First World War, the VDK is very committed to taking a census of the places where their remains are located. The first information reports were published in the magazine *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* in June 1921 and continued until the early 1930s<sup>57</sup>. About 213 cemeteries are scattered in the territories of the Isonzo, Tagliamento, Piave and Dolomites: their reorganization, announced in the bulletin of November 1935, is the consequence of an agreement between the governments of Italy and Germany and does not include, at this stage, the Austro-Hungarian cemeteries in Trentino and South Tyrol<sup>58</sup>.

Communicated in advance of the official meetings that began in Rome in January 1936 and ended on June 2, with the signing of the agreement between Italy and Germany, the VDK’s constructive programme in Italy is the result of long preparation. The reform projects of two existing military cemeteries, Feltre San Paolo and Quero, were presented in the Berlin exhibition of December 1933: while the first was to be carried out without substantial changes, the second

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55 “Ochsenblut, Quark, Kälberhaaren” (ox blood, cream cheese, and calf’s hair) are natural components of a mortar based on lime and sand with quartz or marble flakes used as a binder in VDK constructions; Hans Gstettner, “Die Handwerkskultur im Werk des Volksbundes”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.5 (1940): 58-67.

56 *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.6/7 (1938): 89. On that occasion (just two months after the annexation of Austria) General Cei urged a solution for the former Austro-Hungarian cemeteries, still in large numbers (847) on Italian territory. Germany’s competence over them was formally established at the first meeting of the German-Italian Committee in Rome in 1940; the agreement was finalized in technical details on 10 June 1942 (ACGOC).

57 A detailed survey of the burial sites is in Baccichet, *Il sacrario sul Tagliamento*, 16-19.

58 These cemeteries were cared for by the Österreichisches Schwarzes Kreuz until 1938, but mainly by local committees. From 1941-42 onwards, the ADG carried out reforms affected the Austro-Hungarian cemeteries of Bondo, Levico, Ora, Trento, and Vigo di Fassa in Trentino (mentioned as “under renovation” during the Vienna meeting); of Merano and Bressanone in South Tyrol: Marco Mulazzani, “Cimiteri militari delle due Guerre Mondiali in Alto Adige”, *Turris Babel*, “Cimiteri. Friedhöfe”, no.95 (May 2014): 20-37.

was completely rethought, with a new location on Col Maor. This decision can probably be traced back to the summer of 1934: a VDK report communicates that the meetings between the German delegation and the Italian authorities ended with an agreement on the possibility of building “monuments to German heroes” in all places of historical importance of the war and that the first site inspection was carried out under the supervision of Tischler<sup>59</sup>. In the first half of 1935, the VDK made attempts to buy the land on Col Maor directly from the owners<sup>60</sup>. From the surviving documentation<sup>61</sup> it is possible to reconstruct the design development of German memorials in Italy. The plans of Feltre and Tolmino bear the dates May 1934 and May 1935, the executive drawings of Quero June and July 1936<sup>62</sup>, the first version of the “monument” of Pordoi is dated January 1937. Finally, apparently later, the Pinzano memorial: first documented project in April 1939; final design and partial executive tables March, November, and December 1941, with additions made in January 1942. However, it is the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* that fully returns the work of the Volksbund in Italy. In April 1936, some photographs of the Dolomites and the Tagliamento strait accompanied an article dedicated to the “battlefields and war cemeteries in Upper Italy”, and the news that the Volksbund was preparing to build three memorials: on the Piave, the Tagliamento and Isonzo. In June, two perspective sketches by Tolmin and Quero accompany a text by Hallbaum concluded by an epitaph, referring to Quero, which evokes the stubborn steadfastness – “like the mountain” – of the resistance put up by the German soldiers against the besiegers<sup>63</sup>. In November 1936 an image of the wooden model on Col Maor was published and almost a year later, in October 1937, Hallbaum presented the works under construction at that time – Tolmino, Quero, Feltre – accompanied by views of the Isonzo, the Piave, the Tagliamento near Pinzano and Passo Pordoi, where two other new memorials were “raised”<sup>64</sup>. The bulletin of November 1937 is entirely dedicated to the cemetery of Feltre. Buildings in Italy are still documented in 1938, in the January (Tolmino), March, May and December (Quero) issues. The 1939 edition of the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* is largely devoted to the memori-

59 *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge. Arbeitsbericht 1933/34 (1934): 6-7.*

60 The initiative, followed by the German consul in Trieste, was blocked by the Italian government in July 1935 due to the lack of an official protocol between the two countries. The agreement of June 1936 stipulates that the Italian government will acquire the land by expropriation and hand it over in perpetual use to the German government in return for reimbursement of expenses. On several occasions, to speed up the process, the VDK makes the proposal both to supplement the price of the land and to advance part of the amounts to the sellers (documentation in ACGOC): Gabriele Toneguzzi, “Il Totenburg di Quero: Dunkle, wie mit Blut getränkt. Scuro, come inzuppato di sangue”, in D’Amelio, *Per non dimenticare*, 76-89.

61 The VDK archive does not contain original drawings of the plans for memorials in Italy, which were lost along with much of the related documentation in 1945, except for several photographs. Drawings and documents (not complete) are kept at the Commissariato Generale per le Onoranze ai Caduti (ACGOC) in Rome and the municipality of Quero Vas (BL).

62 Some executive drawings of the Tolmin memorial with the same date, are preserved in the Pokrajinski arhiv (Provincial Archives) in Nova Gorica (SL), confirming the simultaneous development of the two projects.

63 “Trotzig und fest, wie der Berg, / Hielten wir stand den Bedrängern; / Treu umarmt uns der Grund, / Den wir einst lebend betreut” (Obstinate and steadfast as the mountain, / we have resisted the besiegers / the land faithfully embraces us / that we once cared for when we were alive): [Franz] Hallbaum, “Kahle Gräberfelder mahnen...”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.6 (1936): 85-86. The construction site in Quero did not actually begin until the end of August 1936.

64 Hallbaum, “Wir bauen...”, writes that Feltre was completed at the beginning of the year and Quero will be completed in the autumn; about Pinzano, that the work has not yet begun, but the plans are ready.



32 - 33 - 34

als that have been completed and are in progress: Tolmin (January, May, June, July, the entire September, November issue); Quero (March, May, June, July, the entire issue of August, October, November); Feltre (June and July); and finally Pinzano, with an image of the Tagliamento in June and a photomontage of the scale model on the November cover. The “information campaign” continued in 1940: in January Pordoi, presented with a “natural model”<sup>65</sup> in the landscape – the construction site was already underway – and Quero on the back cover; in February, new photographs of the works in Pordoi and Pinzano with the caption: “also in the year 1939 the Volksbund built the walls of the monuments of honor”. In March, photographs of Tolmin and Quero – the latter, flanked by an image of the castle of Lagopesole because, like the latter, it is destined to “stand the test of time”. In May, Tolmin is on the back cover, and, in June/July, the Italian works illustrate (among others) a text by Hans Gstettner on the significance of the VDK’s achievements. In November 1940, in addition to the cover with a view of Pinzano in the distance<sup>66</sup>, images of Feltre, Tolmino and Quero accompany Gomoll’s fourth text dedicated to memorials in Italy. On this occasion, other “castles of the dead” are announced: on the Monte Croce Carnico Pass, on the Karst and on the plateau of the Seven Municipalities<sup>67</sup>. In the following years, the presence of Italian works in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* was constant, up to the cover of the last issue of November/December 1944, dedicated to Feltre. Evidently, the significance attributed by the Volksbund to the German memorials in Italy is not commensurate with the number of soldiers to be given a “dignified burial”.

The war cemetery of Feltre San Paolo is one of the provisional burial places built in the last months of 1917. The decision to make it permanent is probably due to its location, far from the town and among the fields, with a view of the mountains in the distance. The burial ground, raised above the road, is bordered on four sides by a wall made of boulders of Valdobbiadene “biancone”, irregularly rendered. The entrance to the cemetery is through a sort of chapel consisting

65 Regarding the photomontages published in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, the creation of life-size silhouettes in Italy has documentary evidence from other sources only for Pinzano.

66 It is perhaps a retouching of the photograph, given the backwardness of the work on the memorial.

67 Gomoll, “Die ewige Wache...”. Of the three new monuments, designed for thousands of soldiers of the former Austro-Hungarian army, there is no known documentation. However, the need to build two memorials, on the Asiago Altopiano and on the Karst, for an “enormous number of Austrian corpses” is mentioned in a memorandum from the VDK to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated April 26, 1939 (PAAA, copy in VA, R. 1-111).

Fig. 32

The German military cemetery in Feltre San Paolo, 1933-36.

Fig. 33, 34

The hall of honour with the fresco “Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden” and the burial ground.



35 - 36



37 - 38

of a vestibule and a hall of honor, with a fresco depicting the theme of war camaraderie<sup>68</sup>; outside, sheltered by a loggia, a niche in the wall houses the names of the soldiers written in “sgraffito”. The crosses in the field are made of dark porphyry, with almost rough surfaces. An extensive planting of *Sedum spectabile* (removed in the early 1940s) introduced, at the time of flowering, a chromatic note in accordance with the color of the crosses. [Fig. 32, 33, 34] The simplest of the VDK’s burial places in Italy, however, declares its “soldierly” character. First, in the crowning of the perimeter fence with sloping slabs of reddish stone – like that of the Roeselere-De Ruyter cemetery in Flanders<sup>69</sup> – which makes the sturdy wall even more eloquently “defensive”. Then, in the arrangement of the crosses in the meadow – in a smaller number than the burials – and in the lack, on them, of any indication of names. Finally, in the not-so-disguised hooked cross repeated in the frieze that runs along the inner walls of the “chapel”. The transformation of soldiers’ cemeteries begun in Langemark and “perfected” in Bitolj finds complete expression in Tolmin and Quero: “castles of the dead of German heroes” that garrison places of battle and in which the individuality of fallen soldiers is definitively obliterated in the Kameradengrab, the collective burial ground without crosses or tombstones.

68 A soldier holds his mortally wounded comrade in his arms; the inscription “Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden” (I had a comrade) recalls the incipit of the text by Johann Ludwig Uhland (1809) set to music in 1825 by Friedrich Silcher and adopted by the armies of Germany and Austria. The fresco (Paul Rössler) was replaced in 1970 with a cross (Hans Profanter); the window-stained glass with the acronym ILR (Infanterie-Leib-Regiment) and a stylized soldier’s head, also by Rössler, were replaced after 1945 with other subjects by the same author; the *sgraffito* in the niche is by Karl Riepl. All the characters of the inscriptions are in Fraktur.

69 The explicit reference to the wall of the De Ruyter cemetery – “fortified” in 1935 – in *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.11 (1937).

Fig. 35  
The German Memorial in Tolmin, 1935-38. View from the banks of the Soča.

Fig. 36, 37  
The entrance and the path alongside the Kameradengrab.

Fig. 38  
The vestibule and the gate separating it from the hall of honor.

In Tolmin, the memorial is located at the top of an escarpment on the north bank of the Isonzo. Built in square blocks of Nagelfluh (puddinga)<sup>70</sup> with the sack wall technique, it is composed of a perimeter enclosure visually “strengthened” by a rhythmic sequence of overhangs and a parallelepiped tower cut at 45 degrees from the roof pitch. The outer bastion is surrounded by a moat to the east and north. After stepping on a stone slab placed like a bridge, the enclosure is accessed through a passage closed by a “karabinerschlosser” – a gate made with Mauser rifle barrels and bolts – and along the “washer” traced around a massive pylon ending in an ogive. [Fig. 35, 36, 37, 38] A walkway paved with river pebbles runs to the side of the Kameradengrab, the burial ground planted with honeysuckle shrubs, flanking a two-meter-high wall – an evocation of the existing trench on the site – to the raised terrace, overlooking the Isonzo. On the opposite side is the entrance door to the memorial, which allows the passage of one person at a time to the vestibule, illuminated by two splayed windows and set up with oak wood planks engraved with the names of the identified fallen. A wrought-iron gate separates the vestibule from the Weiheraum, the “consecrated space” of the crypt which is accessed by descending six steps. On the walls, the soldiers’ names are repeated in dark marble mosaic on a gilded background; in the center of the floor, a red sandstone plaque bears along the perimeter an inscription celebrating the eternity of the “glorious deeds of the dead” – a concept reiterated in the inscription of the bronze bell suspended in the cavity of the tower, dedicated to the young heroes of Germany<sup>71</sup>. Tolmin is undoubtedly a small fortress (Festung) whose shape is defined in relation to the characteristics of the place, the topography, the views, and the material used in the construction. At the same time, however, the memorial is attributed the meaning of a “pillar in the current of the river, connected to the bank by history”<sup>72</sup>: a metaphor that underlines both the symbolic relationship sought by the VDK in its works with the places that contain a memory of the war, and the desire to root them in the present time of



39 - 40

70 The river conglomerate comes, according to the sources in the Volksbund Archiv, from the Val Venosta (or the Alto Tagliamento). An accurate technical description of the work can be found in Luca Pellegrini, “I sacrali germanici della grande guerra. Il Toten burg di Tolmino”, *Rassegna Tecnica del Friuli Venezia Giulia*, no.1 (2014): 27-32.

71 The engraved oak planks and mosaic are by Karl Riepl, the wrought irons by Michael Erl. The verses on the tombstone – “Besitz stirbt, Sippen sterben / Du selbst stirbst wie sie / Eines nur ist, das ewig bleibt / Der Toten Tatenruhm” (Possessions die, clans die / You yourself die like them / Only one thing remains eternal / The glory of the dead) – are quotations (modified) from the *Poetic Edda*. The inscription on the bell reads: “Künde du Glockenklang / Ewigen Heldensang / Jungdeutschlands Dank!” (Announce the ringing of the bell / The eternal song of heroes / Young Germany thank you!). The characters of the inscriptions are in Fraktur except for those on the tombstone, in Antiqua.

72 Hans Gstettner, “Der Pfeiler im Strom”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.9 (1939): 134-141.

Fig. 39

The German Totenburg on the Col Maor, Quero, 1935-38. View from the north-east, with the Grappa massif in the background.

Fig. 40

The observation redoubt of the First World War, later incorporated into the construction of the memorial.

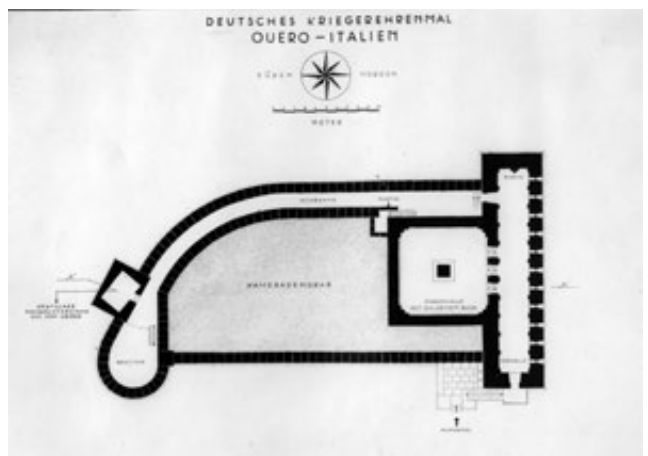
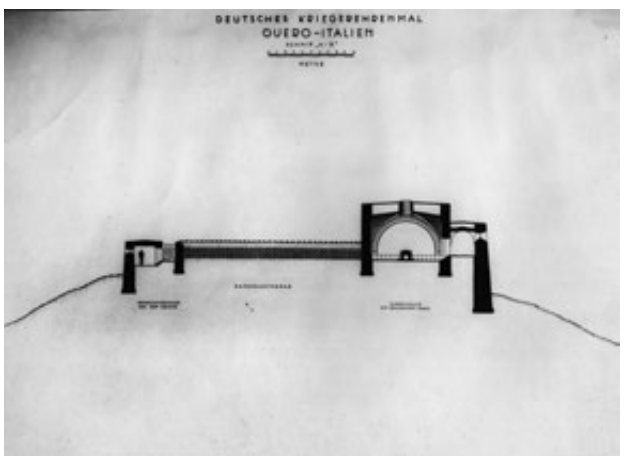


41 - 42



43

44 - 45



Germany and to make them, thanks to the “values” that order them, an expression of “Heimat in fremder Erde”, in the new meaning of “exclave” demonstrated by Bitolj.

Of these “values”, the Quero memorial is an incomparable summa for the Volksbund, starting with the choice of its location on the Col Maor, where an artillery observation post has remained since the war years that looks the Piave to the south and, on the right, the Monte Tomba, the scene of battle from 14 to 17 November 1917. It is therefore understandable that Tischler decided to shelve the first project – too similar to the one currently being executed in Feltre – to create a work that aspires to become paradigmatic of the new “architectural thinking” of the VDK. [Fig. 39, 40]

Fig. 41, 42  
Views from the west and north of the memorial.

Fig. 43  
View from the northeast of the entrance front to the memorial.

Fig. 44, 45  
Deutsches Kriegerehrenmal Quero Italien. Section and floor plan.

“Solemn, severe, powerful”, are the adjectives that recur in the descriptions of the porphyry structure “dark, as if soaked in blood”<sup>73</sup> erected on the hill; “mysterious and enigmatic”, composed of three volumes included in an “invulnerable” masonry made of blocks weighing over 60 quintals<sup>74</sup>. The building is approached from the west – once you have crossed the courtyard of the caretaker’s house<sup>75</sup> – by climbing the hill along a path that leads to its eastern front, where the access staircase is located. [Fig. 41, 42, 43, 44, 45] A very small door leads into the long and narrow vestibule, dimly lit by eleven splayed loopholes (originally screened by alabaster slabs) cut out in the north side wall, and guarded by a “cyclopean warrior”, armed with sword and shield, in high relief on the back wall<sup>76</sup>. Through three arches equipped with gates with elaborate workmanship, you descend into the crypt, cross-vaulted and lit zenith by an oculus. In the centre of the “consecrated space”, on a low predella, an altar in black Swedish granite houses the bronze tablets of the “golden book” in which the names of the identified fallen are engraved. [46, 47] On three walls of the room, a marble mosaic work depicts twelve soldiers with helmets in hands and eyes turned to the ground<sup>77</sup>; on the fourth, the Nazi coat of arms above the central arch is flanked by two cartouches quoting a verse from Heinrich Lersch’s *Die Toten Soldaten*: “the blood of the soldier the blood of the comrade is never alone / always near the soldiers there must be comrades”; immediately above the plinth, an inscription that extols the camaraderie of war in similar tones ends with the words “We confidently await eternity”<sup>78</sup>. At the end of the vestibule a second door leads into the open air, into a small space where a narrow staircase – little more than a protrusion of the masonry – climbs up to the podium overlooking the burial ground, planted with heather shrubs. At the top of the retaining wall, the high relief of a winged figure – “half boy, half sphinx, imperturbable genius of supernatural clarity”<sup>79</sup> – holds out the shield with the insignia of the VDK. The “genius” marks the beginning of a path “in the trenches” – curved and just one and a half meters wide – that obliterates the view outwards up to the south-east bastion, where a raised platform allows the gaze to sweep all around. Immediately before the platform, a

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73 Hans Gstettner, “Wir harren getrost der Ewigkeit...”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 8 (1939): 116-126.

74 Ibid. The first view “from afar” is the perspective from the left bank of the Piave, interesting for the dramatization of the landscape, as well as for the differences with the project carried out (in particular, the theory of corbels at the top of the perimeter wall, perhaps derived from a detail of the castle of Lagopesole): Toneguzzi, “Il Totenburg di Quero...”.

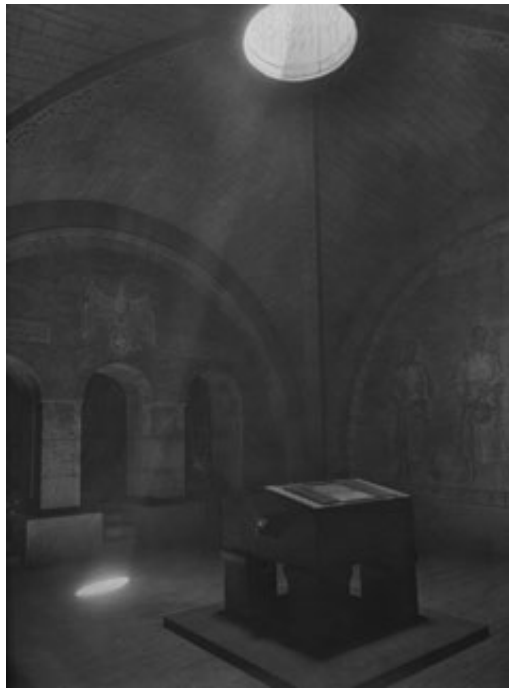
75 Even the caretaker’s house, designed by the Munich construction management, is “Heimat” in every aspect, down to the furnishings and the pergola in the garden, which can be reminiscent of “a farm in the Bavarian Oberland”: Gstettner, “Wir harren getrost...”, 126.

76 After World War II the sculpture was removed; in its place is a cross made in 1959-60. The cross on the outside installed in 1979 is by Manfred Bergmeister.

77 Created in place of a fresco initially planned like the one in Feltre, the mosaic work (inspired by a war photograph) is executed on cartoons by Lois Gruber by Werkstätten Van Treeck. The altar was made by the sculptor Kroher; all other sculptures are by Ernst Geiger, railings by Michael Erl.

78 The inscription reads: “Wir liegen zusammen in Reih und Glied / wir standen zusammen im Leben / drum gleiches Kreuz und gleicher Schmuck ward uns aufs gegeben / Nun ruhen wir aus vom heissen Streit und harren getrost der Ewigkeit” (We lie together in neat rows / Together we have been alive / That is why we have been assigned the same cross and the same decoration / Now we rest from the heated struggle and confidently await eternity).

79 Hans Gstettner, “Das ist Quero, Tolmein und Feltre...”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.6 (1939): 82-89.



46 - 47

“karabinerschlösser” marks the entrance to the former artillery emplacement: a remnant of war – like the bunkers of Langemark – incorporated into the building like a relic, testifying once again to the ritually foundational relationship established in the Volksbund memorials with every “strip of land sanctified by the blood sacrifice of soldiers”<sup>80</sup>. [Fig. 48, 49]

Among the architectures created by the VDK, Quero is undoubtedly the most sophisticated. Its constructive form fully corresponds to a spatial organization obtained by composing “places” – entrance, vestibule, “consecrated space”, trench or “patrol” path, observation platform on the bastion, ordered with liturgical precision around the bunker – a sort of martyrrium – and the “burial ground of the comrades”, “ideal center of strength” here “raised to the sky”<sup>81</sup>. As always in the works of the Volksbund, the relationship between the Kameradengrab and the Weiheraum – the place of the “supra-individual” union of the soldiers and the space “consecrated” by their names – is fundamental, here set at the same height to symbolize the union of the celestial vault of the former with the physical vault of the latter, transfigured in the ascension of the ribs up to the summit oculus<sup>82</sup>. In the crypt of Quero it is perhaps possible to recognize some influence of the reform carried out in 1931 by Heinrich Tessenow in the Neue Wache in Berlin<sup>83</sup>; however, it fails to express the sacredness of that essential space, simply configured “in a workmanlike manner”<sup>84</sup>. On the contrary,

80 Gstettner, *Soldatenmale*, 15.

81 Max Arendt, “Die materielle und geistige Rüstzeug des Baukünstlers”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 9/10 (1943): 50-56.

82 The ribs and oculus are decorated with signs “in which the light of the eternal stars mingles with the fires of hatred and song”; Gstettner, *Wir harren getrost...*, 120.

83 Kuberek, “Die Kriegsgräberstätten...”, 84.

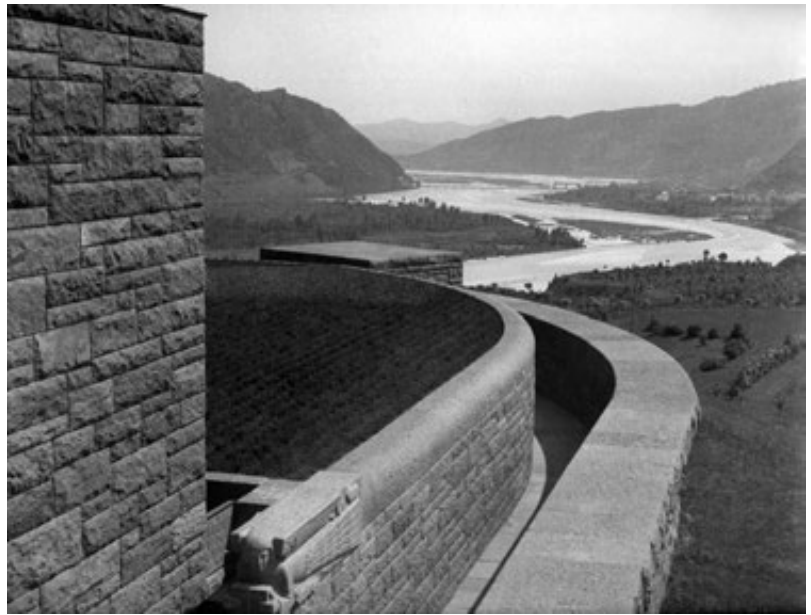
84 Siegfried Kracauer, “Zur Einweihung des Berliner Ehrenmals”, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, no.2 (June 1931) (*Casabella*, no. 714 (2003): 59).

Fig. 46

The vestibule and the entrance to the hall of honor.

Fig. 47

The hall of honour with the altar made of black Swedish granite and the mosaics on the walls.



the multiple signs summoned to the crypt – the mosaics and writings, the “altar of blood” (Blutaltar) and the swastika in the eagle’s talons, much more than an “obligatory” effigy – impose themselves as symbols that “sacralize” a deceptive and negative value: the experience of “eternal” war, offered to the “community of the people” as the “supreme expression of the German Nation”<sup>85</sup>. Precisely by virtue of these “tattoos”, the “monument” is precluded from access to true spiritual completeness; nor is it allowed, as a witness to this “Germanic spirit”, to “survive time”<sup>86</sup>.

Until the end of the 1930s, the construction of the VDK in Italy was held in high esteem in Germany, as evidenced by the “6 days on the Berlin-Rome axis”<sup>87</sup>, the journey made in May 1939 by a wide range of representatives of the Reich, the NSDAP and the Wehrmacht led by Siegfried Emmo Eulen, to inaugurate the memorials in Quero, Feltre and Tolmino. After crossing the Brenner Pass and passing through the “divine garden” (im Garten Götttes) between Bolzano and Trento, the delegation moved from Trento to Quero and Feltre on 25 May; the next day it moves between Treviso, Nervesa della Battaglia and Pinzano, finally arriving in Udine in the afternoon; it continues the 27 May to Tolmin and Gorizia. The official itinerary is also reported in the newspaper *Il Popolo del Friuli*: there one can read of a stop in Pinzano to visit the Col Pion, “where the ossuary monument dedicated to the fallen Germans will be erected”, and that here “the delegation paused to admire the view and listen to the illustration of the project made by the builder”<sup>88</sup>.

85 Walter Benjamin, “Theorien des deutschen Faschismus. Zu der Sammelschrift ‘Krieg und Krieger’, hg. von Ernst Jünger”, *Die Gesellschaft*, 7, 1930 (*Teorie del fascismo tedesco. A proposito dell’antologia ‘Krieg un Krieger’, a cura di Ernst Jünger, in Critiche e recensioni. Tra avanguardie e letteratura di costume* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 153).

86 *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.3 (1940): 46-47, where the images of Quero and the castle of Lagopesole seen in the distance are compared (text by Klaus von Lutzau).

87 *6 Tage auf der Achse Berlin-Rom. Mit dem VDK unterwegs – Deutsche Totenburgen an der Alpenfront* is the brochure of the travel report written by Erich Brandt, published by the VDK in 1939; the inaugurations are documented in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 7 (1939) and in German newspapers.

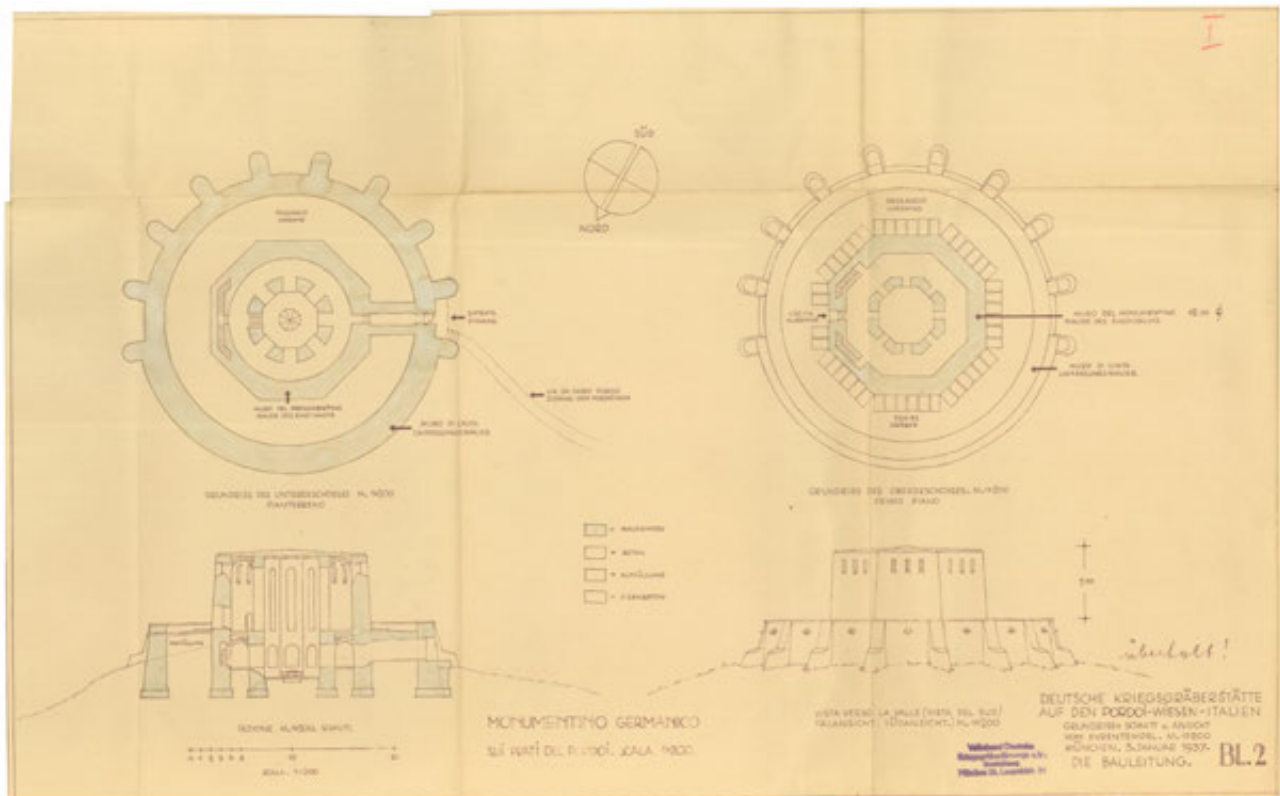
88 “I combattenti tedeschi celebrati a Udine”, *Il Popolo del Friuli*, May 27, 1939, 4; short blurbs also on 24, 25 and

Fig. 48

The trench route to the redoubt and the bastion on the Piave; on the left, the sculpture of the “Winged Genius” with the insignia of the VDK at the entrance to the common burial ground.

Fig. 49

The Kameradengrab.



The construction of the memorials in Pinzano and Passo Pordoi entered the VDK's plans immediately after the June 1936 agreements between Italy and Germany, as evidenced both by the date on the plate of the "Germanic monument" of Pordoi (5 January 1937) and by Hallbaum's article in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* of October 1937 – "Wir bauen in Italien" – in which the plans for Pinzano are said to have been "completed". In the same month of October, the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* reported that the Italian Commissariato was preparing to build an ossuary in Pinzano for many hundreds of German soldiers. In a letter addressed to the Foreign Office, the Volksbund denies this rumour, declaring that the monument will be built under its own care and specifying the extent of the land – about 3 hectares and not the improbable 30,000 indicated by the press. On May 24, 1938, two months after the annexation of Austria, an article in the *Jenaische Zeitung* announced the expansion of the VDK's commitment in Italy, resulting from taking over the graves of the former Austro-Hungarian army: the planned constructions in Pinzano and Passo Pordoi were mentioned, but also the need for new memorials. On December 10, 1938, a letter from the VDK informed that 1,000 identified bodies and 25,000 unknown bodies could be buried in each of the two shrines<sup>89</sup>. Germany's competence over the burials of the former Austro-Hungarian army was established only at the first meeting of the Italian-German Committee in November 1940: the VDK's response to the requests made in May 1938 by General Cei at the congress of the organiza-

26 May. The "builder" was the Vittorio Marchioro company of Vicenza, which in these years built the main Italian shrines designed by Giovanni Greppi and Giannino Castiglioni.

89 Documentation and letters from Tischler and Eulen to the Auswärtiges Amt in PAAA, copy in VA, R. 1-4; R. 1-5; R. 1-111.

Fig. 50  
Deutsche Kriegsgräberstätte  
auf den Pordoi-Wiesen  
Italien.  
Plans, section and south-facing  
downstream of the first project,  
5 January 1937.



tion in Breslau was therefore very timely.

In addition to having the appearance of a “real fortress” built with large blocks of porphyry, the “monument” of Pordoi has a strategic control of the Dolomites front of 1915-17 – an intentionality confirmed “a posteriori” by a schematic map showing the views from the memorial towards the “former combat areas”. [Fig. 50] The project of January 1937 shows an octagonal construction (about 15x15 meters the apothem) “defended” by a circular wall (30 meters in diameter) that presents, towards the valley, ten buttresses shaped like a scarp. From the entrance, cut into the wall between two spurs, a narrow gallery leads to the ambulatory, which leads down to the center of the “space of honor”, a room about 4x4x12 meters high. From a gallery superimposed on the ambulatory, which can be reached via pincer stairs carved into the thickness of the wall (160 centimeters), you enter the burial ground located outside, within the walls. In a subsequent proposal, undated but probably from 1938, the location and the general character of the project are confirmed – except, on the outside, for the disappearance of the buttresses and the redefinition of the crowning of the boundary wall, with the addition, as in Quero, of a series of corbels. On the other hand, the internal organization underwent significant changes: in particular, the “space of honor” surrounded by the ambulatory was no longer walkable, due to the provision of a new underground level intended as an ossuary. [Fig. 51, 52] Started in the spring of 1939, the construction site on the Pordoi Pass proceeded slowly, with a practicability of just over two and a half months a year<sup>90</sup>. In 1943 the remains of almost 9,000 “unknown” soldiers, mostly from the former Austro-Hungarian army, were buried in the crypt<sup>91</sup>; then construction stopped. When work resumed in 1956, there were two further changes to the project, anticipated (with some differences) in a model that was probably from before the war. Inside the memorial, both the lower ambulatory and the gallery above have been removed, replaced by a simple gallery from which you can ac-

90 *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 1 (1940; no. 2 (1940), with some images of the construction site.

91 This operation was carried out despite growing complaints to the VDK over the continuation of the practice of collective burials. In February 1944, the delegate of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the care of war graves in Italy criticized the “excessive monumentality” of Pordoi’s memorial; at the same date, the German ambassador to the Social Republic of Salò declared the Volksbund’s failure to comply with the principle of safeguarding the recognizability of individual burials in Italian works “untenable”; Ulrich, Fuhrmeister, Hettling, Kruse, *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, 258.

Fig. 51

Model of the third project of the memorial on the Pordoi Pass.

Fig. 52

The construction site interrupted at the level of the crypt, circa 1943.



53 - 54



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cess the external burial ground, included in the first city wall. The layout of the room is completed with the creation of an octagonal sarcophagus surmounted by a “cup of fire” (Feuerschale), four sculptural groups each consisting of two soldiers and a stylized eagle in the ceiling mosaic<sup>92</sup>. Outside, a second walled ring, barely emerging from the profile of the ground, houses the burials of soldiers who fell in the Second World War. Overall, the image of the “fortress” on the pass does not change – a “continuity” certainly justified by a construction site already set, but which finds other parallels in Tischler’s projects after the Second World War.

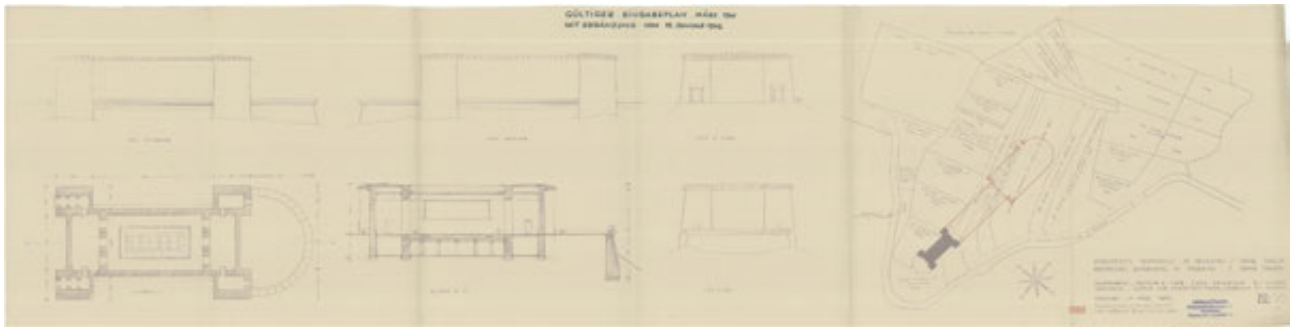
More controversial is the story of the Pinzano memorial, which between 1939 and 1941 underwent changes during construction in the shape of the main building and especially in the design of the outdoor spaces. The project dated April 1939, verified with a life-size model, prefigures a slightly tapered parallelepiped (about 32x12 meters at the base, 7 meters high) flanked by two towers at the south end and concluded with a semicircular porticoed bastion (10 meters radius) from which – as reported by *Il Popolo del Friuli* on May 27, 1939 – “between the corbels, you will see the valley”. The entrance to the memorial, in the west tower, leads to the portico and the courtyard and from here, on a low podium, into the “consecrated space” (Weiheraum); a staircase in the east tower allows the ascent to the upper gallery. The Weiheraum – closed on all four sides by an ambulatory and the gallery above – measures 5x20 meters in base and, as at Passo Pordoi, is not practicable because the flooring, lowered, coincides with the roof of the ossuary planned in the basement. “Inside the imposing work”, informs the Udine newspaper, “a large memorial hall will house about 30,000 bodies on the sides”. The image published in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* of November

Fig. 53  
Photomontage of the preliminary project of the memorial of Pinzano sul Tagliamento with photo editing of the context. *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, 11, 1939.

Fig. 54  
View from the west of the real-life model of the second project of the memorial in Pinzano, 1939.

Fig. 55  
Germanic monument in Pinzano, Udine, Italy / Deutsche Ehrenmal in Pinzano, Udine, Italy. Plan, plan, section and fronts of the first project, April 1939.

92 All works are by Munich artists: the sculptures by Albert Allmann; the sarcophagus with the cup of fire from Eisenwerth (Fritz Schmolli); the mosaic in the ceiling by Franz Grau; the bronze workmanship of Otto Gattinger.



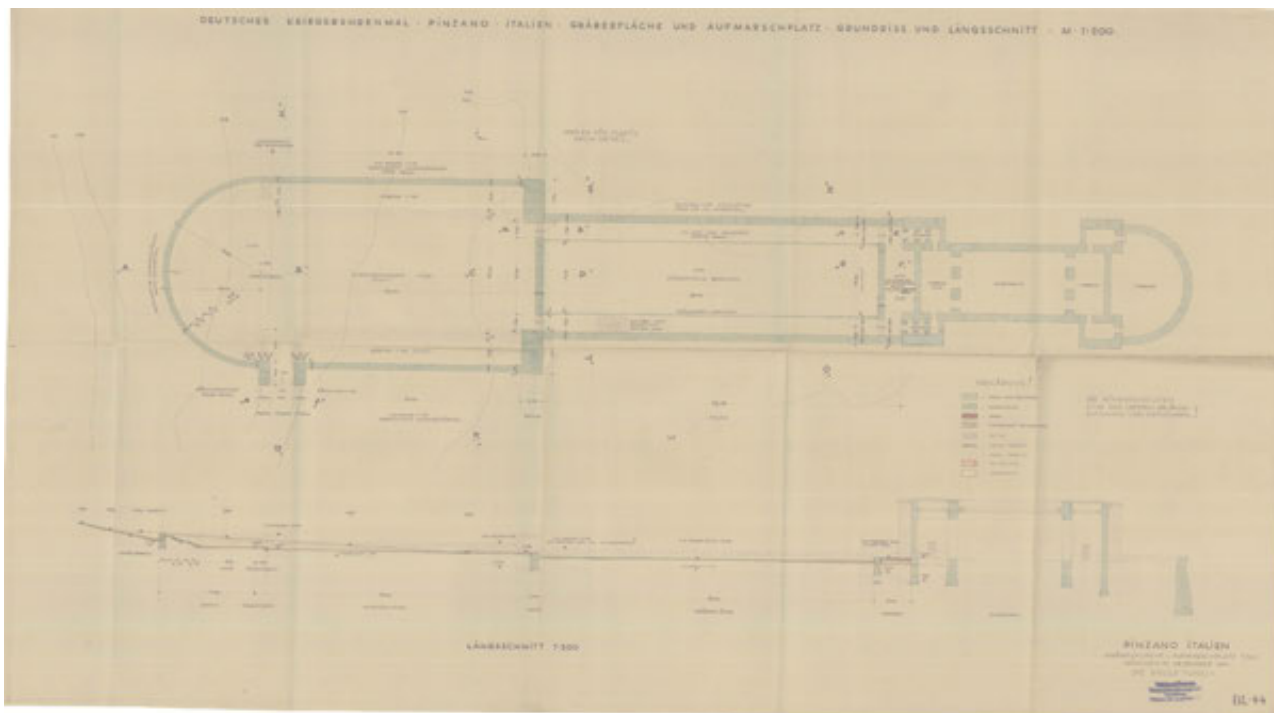
1939, indicated as a “natural” model “made to test the effect in the landscape”, does not correspond to the one erected on the hill. [Fig. 53, 54, 55] The south towers are lower than the eaves line of the main volume and the latter, closed to the north by a curved wall, is surrounded by a sequence of buttresses. Likely, the photomontage of the scale model, inserted in a conspicuously altered context to highlight the profile of the building<sup>93</sup>, represents the project mentioned by Hallbaum in October 1937, modified in April 1939 because of the changed circumstances – among others, the need to bury a greater number of bodies in the memorial. The construction site begins on the south side, with the walls of the bastion and the towers – as documented by the images published in February 1940 in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* – but the project will be further modified. A drawing from March 1941 records the addition of two more towers on the north side and the disappearance of both the portico and the rampart corbels. The building is raised up to 10 meters and reportioned in length – 36 meters, including the towers – while the “consecrated space” is “uncovered”. [Fig. 56, 57] Drawings from November and December 1941 show the final configuration of the project and the details of the outdoor spaces on the north side of the memorial. Here there is a common burial ground (12x55 meters, 140 centimeters deep)<sup>94</sup> and an arena (35x60 meters) surrounded by grassy steps bordered in stone. The entrance to the complex is from the north-west side of the arena: a 4-meter gap between stone plinths of 2x4 meters in base and just under 3 meters in height. After crossing the arena, the path continues along the sides of the burial ground along two walkways, almost 3 meters wide, up to the podium in front of the north front of the fortress, designed by the two new towers. The massive trilithic structures inserted in the hollow body of the towers leave gaps of just over a meter – a constraint accentuated by the ascending pavement – to be crossed to reach the vestibule, a sort of archaic pronaos facing the court of honor; on the opposite side, a second vestibule allows you to reach, through the south towers, the bastion overlooking the Tagliamento. In the centre of the courtyard, a rectangular predella slightly sunk into the floor and surrounded by a

93 Baccichet, *Il sacrario sul Tagliamento*, 98-99. In the photomontage, the hill of Ragogna with the castle and the church of San Pietro, which from the point of view assumed constitute the backdrop of the memorial on the other side of the river, are completely erased. The publication in November 1939 of an outdated project is probably due to the greater communicative effectiveness of the image.

94 The burial ground of Pinzano is planned for 6,000 sarcophagi – the same number of “known bodies” that, together with 50,000 “unknown” bodies, the VDK indicates as burial both in Pinzano and in Pordoi in a report to the AA of 26.2.1943 (PAAA; copy in VA, R. 1-296).

Fig. 56

Germanic monument in Pinzano, Udine, Italy / Deutsche Ehrenmal in Pinzano, Udine, Italy. Plan, plan, section and fronts of the final project, March 1941, modified on 12.1.1942 with the addition of the arena and the common burial ground.



dentilled cornice identifies the underground level of the ossuary (4 meters at the internal height). In the construction of the memorial and in the external works, blocks of Carnian ceple are used; slabs of silver beola cover the external paths and pink granite slabs the internal floors; in yellow sandstone are both the twin monolithic pillars of the vestibules and, in large blocks, the cladding of the walls of the court of honor<sup>95</sup>. Here, as in the vestibules, the stone apparatus leaves large free surfaces, probably intended to house the works of the “Bauhütte” of Munich<sup>96</sup>.

Of all the German memorials, the one on the Tagliamento was to be in the words of Hans Gstettner “the closest to an ancient temple”<sup>97</sup>. However, as demonstrated by the size of the building and the solutions of some spaces – for example, the usual constriction of the entrances – this aspiration does not produce substantial changes in the typical character of the Totenburgen: if anything, the attempt seems to be to modify the “celebratory rituality”. To understand the significance of this transformation, it may perhaps be useful to think of the images of the inaugurations of May 1939 in Quero, Feltre and Tolmino: a disjointed crowding of individuals, made even more difficult in Quero by the sloping terrain,

95 An accurate description and quantification of the materials can be found in Luca Pellegrini, “Il Sacrario germanico di Pinzano”, *Rassegna Tecnica del Friuli Venezia Giulia*, no.1 (2012): 12-17.

96 In the VA there is no information about the planned works, but the sculptor Eisenwerth (Fritz Schmolli) had been commissioned to create lion figures – perhaps inspired by the “Marathon lions” – at the entrance to the arena and in the passage between it and the Kameradengrab: Barbara Küppers, *Fritz Schmolli*, 348.

97 Hans Gstettner, “Schriftgestaltung im Dienst der Heldenherung”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 7/8 (1942): 50-58. In this text, which is dedicated to the form of writing in the cemeteries and memorials of the VDK, Gstettner conjures up the image of a temple in connection with the planned use of Roman lapidary characters instead of Gothic runes. However, both in Quero and on the tombstone in the crypt of Tolmin the Antiqua is used. This typeface has enjoyed a renewed fortune in Germany since 1941, after Hitler’s ban on the use of Fraktur in official publications. The *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* discontinued Fraktur (except for the magazine header) from the first issue of January/February 1942.

Fig. 57  
Deutsches Kriegerehrenmal  
Pinzano Italien. Plan and  
longitudinal section of the final  
project, 22.12.1941.

not the compact and orderly mass required by the Nazi celebrations<sup>98</sup>. This “necessity” probably accounts for the addition of the “introductory” space of the arena. It is not, however, a Thingplatz, a form of choral theatre and a “cultic” term banned in Germany since October 1935<sup>99</sup>, but a parade field (Aufmarschplatz) with Greco-Roman references, like the much larger one set up by Tischler in 1938 at the Waldenburg memorial in Upper Silesia: both simulacra of “mass vessels”.

In Pinzano we find further confirmation of Tischler’s extraneousness – or uncultured disinterest – in the problems of the “national style” and the ideals of a tradition such as that of the “Prussian style”<sup>100</sup>, at the center of the attention of architects endowed with a very different culture than his own. The trilithic structures in the entrance towers, whether they are “actualized” megalithic tombs or fragments of Luxor’s funerary temples, together with the pseudo-Egyptian style of the court of honor and vestibules and the semicircular south bastion – which remains, despite its simplification, an eloquent piece of the original “fortress” project – testify to the “barbaric” randomness with which Tischler considers architectural models. In this regard, for the detail of the twin pillars of the vestibules, placed side by side to leave a slit of a few centimeters, Tischler can have an example that is as close as it is appropriate, although probably unloved: the portico on the courtyard of honor (or the head) of the *Soldatenhalle* designed in 1938 by Wilhelm Kreis in the north-south axis of Albert Speer’s plan for Berlin. However, even if this were the reference, it would not be enough to “save” Tischler from the accusation addressed to him by Kreis of preferring forms inspired by an “unstructured cubism” for the constructions of the Volksbund. On the contrary, the comparison between the heterogeneous “temple” of Pinzano and the “colossal” monuments designed by Kreis between 1941 and 1943 to mark the boundaries of the Reich’s expansion – on the Atlantic and the North Sea, in the East, in the Balkans and in Africa – confirms the diminishing significance, in the last years of the Nazi regime, of the VDK’s work. Nine years after appreciating the position of Totenburg Bitolj because it “dominates the entire region”<sup>101</sup>, Kreis granted the Volksbund in 1943 the sole merit of having created, through the foundation and development of “craft enterprises”, “creations that are exemplary in terms of artistic foundation and beauty”<sup>102</sup>. It is now the projects of the “general councillor” Kreis that embody “in landscapes of warlike resolve the sense of a great historical turning point”<sup>103</sup>, as “symbols of the faith

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98 The inaugurations are documented in the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no. 7 (1935) and in a short film preserved in the VA.

99 Stommer, *Die inszenierte*, 122, 288-289. After the prohibition of the use of the term, the Thingstätte were renamed Feierstätte (places of celebration).

100 Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Der preussische Stil*, München 1916, Breslau 1931. *Stile prussiano*, in Francesco Dal Co, *Architettura Germania 1880-1920* (Roma: Laterza, 1982), 114-120.

101 Wilhelm Kreis, “Kunst und Handwerk. Schöpferisch vereint in der Gestaltung deutscher Kriegsgräberstätten”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.7 (1934): 106-108. Right from the title, however, the text focuses on the “creative union” of “artistic and craft culture” of the VDK.

102 Wilhelm Kreis, “Kriegermale des Ruhmes und der Ehre im Altertum und in unserer Zeit”, *Bauwelt*, no.11/12 (1943), in Anna Teut, *Architektur im Dritten Reich 1933-45* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1967), 222-226.

103 Gerdy Troost, *Das Bauen im neuen Reich. Zweiter Band* (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayreuth, 1943), 7.



and unity of the German people, true divine constructions, memory of an eternal and omnipotent creative power”<sup>104</sup>. In their presence, what can be appreciated in Tischler’s work is the measure of the spaces and – even in Pinzano – the ability to arrange the external arrangements. It is perhaps no coincidence that the penultimate issue of the *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* of September-October 1944 is devoted to the theme of the “shape of gardens” in the “places of honour” created by the Volksbund<sup>105</sup>.

In 1943 the work on Pinzano was almost completed and in April – after the meeting of the Italian-German Committee in Vienna<sup>106</sup> – the VDK declared it capable of accommodating up to 100,000 “unknown Austrian soldiers” (unbekannte Österreichischen Soldaten), asking the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the necessary funding to start the burial operations. To this end, it should be noted, all construction work has been suspended to concentrate efforts on completing the crypt<sup>107</sup>. However, the evolution of the events of the war – and the relative lack of economic resources to allocate to these items of expenditure – makes this proposal impracticable. [Fig. 58] Definitively abandoned at the

104 Friedrich Tamms, “Die Kriegerherrenmäler von Wilhelm Kreis”, *Die Kunst im Deutschen Reich (Ausgabe B)*, März 1943. In 1943 Kreis received the Adlerschild des Deutschen Reiches – the highest honour awarded, already in the Weimar Republic, for academic or artistic merits – and became president of the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste (the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts).

105 Wilhelm Conrad Gomoll, “Unsere Ehrenstätte und ihre gärtnerische Gestaltung”, *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, no.9/10 (1944): 38-43.

106 The “remedial solutions” requested by Italy in Vienna in 1943 are the subject of an exchange of letters between the Auswärtiges Amt, the Reichsminister des Innern and the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. On the part of the latter (and of the VDK) it is noted that the plans for Pinzano and Pordoi had been known for some time to the Italian Commissariato and approved by General Grassi at a meeting on 19 January 1942 (PAAA, copy in VA, R. 1-297).

107 In the letter sent to the AA on 5.4.1943, the VDK refers to the similar situation in Pordoi, with the construction of the memorial suspended and the crypt ready to receive the bodies of the “unknowns” (PAAA, copy in VA, R. 1-296).

Fig. 58  
The Pinzano memorial just completed, 1943.



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end of 1943, the “fortress” became in 1944 a German military post to guard the bridge over the Tagliamento. At the beginning of September, the building was hit by a bomb dropped by a Royal Air Force plane, which caused the destruction of the towers and part of the northern vestibule. After the war, the fate of Pinzano remained in uncertainty for almost ten years, followed by a long period of oblivion because of the restriction imposed in 1954 by the Italian Ministry of Defense, which forbade access to the Col Pion complex “for military reasons”<sup>108</sup>. None of the proposals put forward up to that time for the recovery of the memorial were successful: not even the one deliberated in July 1945 by the National Liberation

Committee of the province of Udine to erect a monument to the memory of the partisans on the “stone base built by the Germans on the Pinzano bridge”; nor the hypothesis advocated by General Grassi, which re-emerged in 1946 and remained in vogue until the beginning of 1950, to complete the memorial and use it for the burials of Italian soldiers; nor, finally, the VDK’s attempt, in 1957, to recover the “beautiful material” installed in Pinzano for use in other constructions planned in Italy<sup>109</sup>. The latter hypothesis was prompted by Robert Tischler, who was again intensely involved in the design of cemeteries dedicated to German soldiers who fell in the Second World War<sup>110</sup>. [Fig. 59]

108 An exhaustive description of the events that took place in Pinzano after 1943 is in Baccichet, *Il sacrario sul Tagliamento*, 123 ff.

109 Documentation in ACGOC and VA, A. 100-879.

110 Marco Mulazzani, *La foresta che cammina. Le sepolture dei soldati tedeschi 1920 1970* (Milan: Electa, 2020).

Fig. 59

View of the memorial at Passo Pordoi after its completion in 1959.

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