Chapter 3
Monuments Destroyed, Spared, and Stolen

As it advanced into Ukraine, the invading Russian military destroyed a number of war memorials, both deliberately and unintentionally. Some of the accidental damage was widely reported in the Ukrainian and international media. On March 1, 2022, the building of a planned museum at the Babyn Iar memorial site in Kyiv was damaged during Russian shelling of a nearby television tower. Babyn Iar, the site of one of the deadliest Nazi massacres of Jews and Roma, had been at the center of a protracted international controversy about a future memorial complex.[1] A menorah-shaped Holocaust memorial at the Drobyts'ky Iar execution site outside Kharkiv was likewise damaged by a Russian missile on March 26. Two days earlier, Russian artillery fire had hit Kharkiv's largest memorial to the Great Patriotic War, the Memorial of Glory.[2] In Bucha, near Kyiv, Russian tanks shelled a Soviet-era armored vehicle installed on a pedestal as a memorial to the Soviet-Afghan war, mistaking it for a Ukrainian

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[1] On the controversy, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "Savior on the Blood, or Ilya Khrzhanovsky's Babyn Yar Experimental Museum," *Krytyka*, April 2020, https://krytyka.com/en/articles/savior-blood-or-ilya-khrzhanovskys-babyn-yar-experimental-museum; PoSoCoMeS, "Babyn Yar Memory Today: Puzzles and Troubles. PoSoCoMeS Roundtable," Youtube video, 1:30:22, September 30, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3rdjMAl_NM, especially the contribution by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

[2] Kharkiv novyny, "Khar'kov 24 marta: Memorial Slavy obstreliali rossiiskie okkupanty," Youtube video, 0:56, March 24, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65clMVd5_z4; "Terekhov: povrezhdeniia ot rossiiskikh 'gradov' dolzhny ostat'sia na Memoriale slavy kak simvol nashei bor'by s sovremennym natsizmom," *Interfax-Ukraina*, May 5, 2022, https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/829957.html and Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

Figure 3.1. Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Shevchenkove, Mykolaïv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, January 2023.

Figure 3.2. Great Patriotic War Memorial in Husarivka, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, July 2023.

tank.[3] In the Donets'k region and in Hostomel' near Kyiv, Russian shelling damaged several memorials to the Great Patriotic War, including at least one communal grave of Red Army soldiers.[4]

There was a specific reason why some war memorials were particularly exposed to such accidental damage. During the Second World War, some of the heaviest fighting was for high ground near important roads, as well

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[3] Teleradiostudiia MO Ukraïny Bryz, "V Buchi okupant vstupyv v bii z pam'iatnykom afhantsiam)))," Facebook video, 0:21, May 16, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1020827048839677.

[4] "Pam'iatky Druhoï svitovoï viiny poshkodyly rosiiany na Donechchyni—zokrema brats'ki mohyly," *Dom*, March 21, 2022, https://kanaldom.tv/uk/pamyatky-drugoyi-svitovoyi-vijny-poshkodyly-rosiyany-na-donechchyni-zokrema-bratski-mogyly-foto/; Vladislav Musienko, "Monument to Soldiers Killed in World War II Damaged in Gostomel as a Result of Explosions and Shelling by Occupiers," *UNIAN Photobank*, April 6, 2022, https://photo.unian.info/photo/1131351-povrezhdennyy-v-rezultate-vzryvov-i-obstrelov-okupantov-pamyatnik-pogibshim-voinam-v-gody-vtoroy-mirovoy-voyny-v-gostomele.

Figure 3.3. Trenches at a Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Teklyne, Cherkasy region. The memorial is located on a hilltop by route N1 Kyiv-Znamenka. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, September 2022.

Figure 3.4. Warning sign near a Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Nova Husarivka, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, July 2023.

as for bridges and fords. Some of the most conspicuous memorials were later erected, often on elevations, to mark the sites of those battles. In the Russian invasion, these places often once again became important targets, leaving the monuments destroyed or damaged. The most prominent example in the early stages of the war was the hill of Savur-Mohyla, discussed in the next chapter. In 2022, the most iconic war memorial to suffer a similar fate was the huge Attack monument, located on Kremenets' hill, the highest point of Kharkiv region. Built in 1988, the monument was damaged during the Russian attack on nearby Izium in March 2022. (Other locations marked with Second World War memorials were fortified by Ukraine in preparation for the Russian onslaught, such as the hilltop memorial near Borshchiv in the Kyiv region, which commemorates the soldiers who died there encircled by German troops in August-September 1941.)

While such unintentional damage was not uncommon, the number of monuments the Russian forces deliberately destroyed on occupied territories for symbolic reasons was significantly higher. So was the variety of Russian agencies involved: whereas the army was in charge of cap-

Figure 3.5. An armored vehicle removing the Ukrainian coat of arms from a memorial to the Heroes of Independent Ukraine in Kherson. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *Kherson: voina bez feikov*, May 22, 2022, t.me/kherson_non_fake/1161.

turing territory and then tended to garrison in the larger cities, the main branches engaged in policing occupied areas, including smaller towns and villages, were the National Guard (*Rosgvardiia*) and military police. They were also the main Russian groups interacting with monuments.

Violence against symbols of Ukrainian identity occurred "possibly also as a substitute for military victories"[5] and was therefore all the more ostentatious. Rather than tacitly de-Ukrainianizing public spaces, the Russian forces often made a show out of removing symbols, staging performances in support of a narrative of liberation from nationalist rule. In late May 2022, a feature on the Russian TV channel *Zvezda* showed a scene, set to uplifting music, of workers removing the Ukrainian coat of arms from an unidentified building. The speaker declared that locals were "getting rid of alien and criminal Ukrainian symbols."[6]

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5   See Dario Gamboni's interpretation of the destruction of the Colonne Vendôme by the Paris Commune: Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 40.

6   While the report is about Nova Ialta, Donets'k region, the building is actually the municipal council of Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region. Georgii Mamsurov, "Put' k miru: kak seichas zhivut Zaporozhskaia i Khersonskaia oblasti Ukrainy," *TRK Zvezda Novosti*, May 29, 2022, https://tvzvezda.ru/news/20225291947-8lpDq.html, 0:40. For further examples of montages showing the removal of Ukrainian symbols from administrative buildings in Zaporizhzhia region, see https://t.me/v_and_z/355, April 21, 2022; https://t.me/mihnovosti/57z, May 8, 2022.

Monuments were among the main symbols singled out for demolition or de-Ukrainianization. One video that circulated widely on pro-Russian Telegram channels showed the destruction of an ATO monument in Kherson—a flagpole with a Ukrainian flag, granite plaques, trident, and candle installed on the pedestal of a former statue of Bolshevik leader Sergo Ordzhonikidze. On May 17, a man who presented himself as a disgruntled former member of Ukraine's Territorial Defense had himself filmed blowing up the flagpole with explosives he claimed he had received from that organization, and tore up the flag.[7] Also in Kherson, Russian soldiers forced passersby at gunpoint to tear down portraits of ATO fighters from the Glory of Ukraine memorial complex; Russian propaganda then presented them as liberated residents, finally shaking off their fear of Ukrainian nationalists.[8]

The main targets were ATO monuments and plaques. In reporting on their destruction or removal, the Russian media made a point of challenging claims of continuity between Ukrainian war efforts in 1941–45 and since 2014 and avoiding the use of terms such as "anti-terrorist operation" used in Ukraine to refer to the conflict. Whenever possible, they mentioned Ukrainian nationalists' involvement in the creation of these monuments. One typical example are Celtic crosses added to Great Patriotic War memorials as part of the nationalist *Pamiat' natsiï* campaign, which were removed in places such as Lazurne, Kherson region (on April 23), and Manhush, Donets'k region (on May 7).[9] The Russian military also made a particular target of monuments displaying the red-and-black flag of the World War II-era Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). In Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region, soldiers on March 14 used an armored vehicle to ram one of the region's first monuments to ATO victims and burned the UPA

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7   "Zhiteli Khersonskoi oblasti pri podderzhke VGA massovo demontiruiut ukrainskie flagi," *NewsFront*, May 15, 2022, https://news-front.info/2022/05/15/zhiteli-hersonskoj-oblasti-pri-podderzhke-vga-massovo-demontirujut-ukrainskie-flagi (no longer accessible in August 2024).

8   https://t.me/kherson_non_fake/694, April 11, 2022. The comment below the republished video regarding the forced character of the removal is corroborated by multiple interviews with local residents.

9   "V prigorode Mariupolia demontirovali pamiatnik getmanu Sagaidachnomu," *RIA Novosti*, May 7, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220507/pamyatnik-1787419621.html; "V osvobozhdennom Mangushe demontirovan odin iz simvolov ukrainskogo natsionalizma—kel'tskii krest," *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 7, 2022, https://dan-news.ru/obschestvo/v-osvobozhdennom-mangushe-demontirovan-odin-iz-simvolov-ukrainskogo-nacionalizma-2/?lang=ru; Mykola Homanyuk's interview with a resident of Lazurne.

flag hoisted above it, at first leaving the neighboring Ukrainian flag intact.[10] Monuments and plaques to individual ATO fighters were also destroyed. One prominent example was a memorial in Kherson to Ruslan Storcheus, a local policeman and commander of the *Kherson* volunteer battalion killed at Ilovais'k in 2014, located in a square named after him.[11]

Similar treatment was reserved for monuments to the Heavenly Hundred. In Skadovs'k, Kherson region, the plaque on a monument to the dead of the Revolution of Dignity (which also honored the fallen of the ATO) was torn out in mid-April; the next day, the entire monument was removed.[12]

In cases when control over a location shifted back and forth between the Russian and Ukrainian armies, one and the same monument could be targeted multiple times. Thus in Luhans'ke, Donets'k region, a cross-shaped monument to famous opera singer Vasyl' Slipak, who died there as a volunteer fighter in 2016, was toppled on March 7 after Russian forces first entered the village, then restored after the Ukrainian army retook Luhans'ke, and finally removed for good on July 10 following its renewed capture by the Russians.[13]

Plaques commemorating ATO fighters are typically installed on buildings where they went to school or college, but also on police stations and other places where the soldiers had worked. These are also among the buildings most frequently requisitioned by the occupying forces, who often swiftly destroyed the plaques.[14] In order to protect the plaques, school directors often had them removed for safekeeping as soon as the Russians arrived, or covered with black PE foil to shield them from view

10   https://t.me/energoatom_ua/3079, March 14, 2022.

11   https://t.me/hueviyherson/21991, July 12, 2022. See "Andrii Hordieiev: 'Nashchadky maiuť bachyty tsinu nashoï nezalezhnosti,'" Khersons'ka oblasna derzhavna administratsiia, August 24, 2017, https://khoda.gov.ua/andrij-gordєєv%3A-«nashhadki-majut-bachiti-cinu-nashoï-nezalezhnosti» for a report about the opening of the memorial.

12   https://t.me/hueviyherson/17215, April 19, 2022; "Rosiis'ki zaharbnyky 'zviľnyly' Skadovs'k vid pam'iatnoho znaku 'Zahyblym za iedynu Ukraïnu,'" *Most*, April 22, 2022, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20220423074817/https://most.ks.ua/news/type/1/url/rosijski_zagarbniki_zvilnili_skadovsk_vid_pamjatnogo_znaku_zagiblim_za_jedinu_ukrajinu; Mykola Homanyuk's interview with a local resident, April 2022.

13   https://t.me/andriyshTime/1769, July 10, 2022.

14   One example is a plaque to local policeman and ATO victim Roman Nabehov on the building of the police station in Oleshky, Kherson region. Source: Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork in Oleshky, April 2022.

Figure 3.6. Memorial plaque for Roman Nabehov on the building of school no. 50 in Kherson. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, July 2022.

and thus keep them from being destroyed (see figure 3.6).[15] In at least one case in Kherson (school no. 50), such a covering was placed not only on an ATO plaque but also on another one commemorating a soldier who died in the Soviet-Afghan War.[16]

Similar interventions appear to have occurred to preserve other memorials slated for removal. In Kherson's Park of Glory along the Dnipro River, a monument to local residents "who gave their lives in the struggle for peace and Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence" was installed in 2014 next to an eternal flame commemorating Great Patriotic War soldiers. On April 15, 2022, when the occupiers ordered the monument's stele removed, instead of dumping it in the Dnipro or breaking it into pieces, someone took it to the Old (Zabalkivs'ke) Cemetery located at a distance of 5 kilometers and placed it face down without damaging it.[17] In May, dried tulips could be seen lying on the stele, which had been turned over to make the inscription visible.[18] The stele may have been saved by municipal workers, or perhaps by ATO veterans, who Russian proxy administrator Kyrylo Stremousov claimed had taken down the monument in an act of repentance for their past involvement in anti-Russian fighting.[19]

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15   Source: Mykola Homanyuk's interview with the director of a school in Oleshky, Kherson region, who mentioned that all school directors in the municipality issued orders to have such plaques removed for preservation. Other schools in the region also show signs of plaques having been carefully removed rather than ripped out and destroyed, such as the plaque to Oleksandr Raikhert on the building of the Kherson Hydro-Meteorological Technical School and city schools nos. 16 and 20 (Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork).

16   Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

17   https://t.me/hueviyherson/16938, April 14, 2022.

18   Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

19   https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1169, April 21, 2022.

Other monuments targeted by the Russians included those built in recent years to commemorate figures, wars, or battles important to Ukrainian national history narratives about resistance against Russia, such as the seventeenth-century Cossack hetman (military leader) Petro Sahaidachnyi or the 1918 Battle of Kruty between the Ukrainian People's Republic and Soviet Russia. Thus, in Manhush, Donets'k region, a 2017 monument to Sahaidachnyi was dismantled with the dual justification that Sahaidachnyi had taken part in the siege of Moscow of 1618 on the Polish side, and that the statue had been erected with participation from Azov regiment fighters.[20] The statue was replaced with a Victory Banner. In Oleshky, Kherson region, a monument in the form of a giant trident was installed in 2018 on the pedestal of a toppled Lenin statue. Based on a design by a Kherson sculptor who was himself an ATO veteran, the monument honored "Heroes of Ukraine" who had supposedly died for the country's independence since the times of Grand Prince Iaroslav the Wise in the eleventh century. In June 2022, the occupation administration removed the trident.[21] In Mariupol', Donets'k region, the occupiers also dismantled a memorial to victims of the Holodomor famine.[22] Many more acts of removal of Holodomor memorials in the occupied parts of Kherson region followed in November 2023, just as the rest of Ukraine was commemorating the 90th anniversary of the famine.[23]

In at least one case, a Great Patriotic War memorial was singled out for destruction simply for featuring a Ukrainian-language inscription. In the village of Osokorivka, Kherson region, Russian soldiers appear to have shot bullets at a stele forming part of the local Great Patriotic War memorial that displayed a verse in Ukrainian.[24] Yet in many other cases such inscriptions were clearly not considered problematic; thus, on December 9,

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20   "V prigorode Mariupolia."

21   "Na Khersonshchine vmesto pamiatnika Leninu ustanovili trizub," *depo Zaporozh'e*, June 6, 2018, https://zp.depo.ua/rus/zp/na-hersonschini-zamist-pam-yatnika-leninu-vstano-vili-trizub-foto-20180606786052; "Na tsentral'noi ploshchadi goroda Alioshki v Kher-sonskoi oblasti demontirovali ukrainskii gerb," *TASS*, June 9, 2022, https://tass.ru/mezh-dunarodnaya-panorama/14867437; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8211, June 9, 2022.

22   "Okupanty Mariupolia demontuvaly pam'iatnyk zhertvam holodomoru," *UA.NEWS*, October 19, 2022, https://ua.news/ua/war-vs-rf/okkupanty-mariupolya-demontirovali-pamyatnik-zhertvam-golodomora.

23   For examples, see Marharyta Dotsenko, "Na terytoriï Ivanivs'koï hromady Khersonsh-chyny okupanty znyshchyly 14 pam'iatnykiv zhertvam Holodomoru," *Most*, November 24, 2023, https://most.ks.ua/news/url/na-teritoriji-ivanivskoji-gromadi-hersonschini-okupanti-znischili-14-pamjatnikiv-zhertvam-golodomoru/.

24   Source: personal communication and photographs by Andrii Selets'kyi.

a decoration ceremony and interviews with Russian soldiers were filmed and broadcast on propaganda channels in front of a 1957 monument in Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region, that bears a Ukrainian-language inscription honoring heroes of the Russian Civil War and the Great Patriotic War (see chapter 7).[25] Even in territories occupied since 2014, war memorials were not necessarily Russified, as evidenced by a memorial to victims of the Nazis on the outskirts of Luhans'k. Its large-scale inscription reads, in Ukrainian, "We shall not forget, we shall not forgive!" The memorial continues to feature prominently in reports about commemorative ceremonies since February 2022.[26]

In some cases, Ukrainian symbols were simply covered with Russian ones, as in the case of an ATO monument in front of the Oleshky, Kherson region, police station where the large trident was painted over with a Z symbol.[27] Elsewhere, Ukrainian symbols were removed from (Ukrainian-built) monuments to render them acceptable to the Russians. Thus, in Kherson, an obelisk honoring the Bolshevik *Iskra* newspaper was dismantled in 2015 and replaced in 2017 with a monument honoring "border guards of all generations."[28] On May 25, the occupiers removed the symbol of Ukraine's border guard agency and a plaque with the Ukrainian-language inscription "Border security is state power," then used the monument to celebrate Russia's own Border Guard Day three days later with a ceremony, flowers, and alcohol.[29]

In many cases, monument destruction or removal happened not at once but in stages. The initial invasion brought a first, somewhat unsystematic wave of iconoclasm, followed by more concerted efforts in April and early May 2022 in preparation for the Victory Day celebrations on May 9. Later destruction appears to have been more haphazard. One example is the ATO monument in Hola Prystan', Kherson region. It displayed portraits of eight local ATO victims on a large plaque attached to a granite

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25 For a similar case in Skadovs'k, Kherson region, see https://t.me/tavriya_kherson/4087, February 22, 2023, 2:20.

26 "Luhanchane u memoryala 'Ne zabudem! Ne prostym' pochtyly pamiať zhertv natsyzma," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, November 11, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/lugancane-u-memoriala-ne-zabudem-ne-prostim-poctili-pamat-zertv-nacizma.

27 Source: Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork in Oleshky, April 2022.

28 "U Khersoni vidkryly pamiatnyk 'Prykordonnykam usikh pokolin','" *Den'*, June 27, 2017, https://day.kyiv.ua/news/271221-u-khersoni-vidkryly-pamyatnyk-prykordonnykam-usikh-pokolin.

29 "Okupanty spapliuzhyly pamiatnyk ukraïns'kym prykordonnykam," *Holos Ukraïny*, May 26, 2022, http://www.golos.com.ua/article/360549; Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

stele that also featured a trident and an inscription honoring Heroes of Ukraine. Four of the portraits were torn down in May. In June, the plaque and trident were ripped out, the lining with the inscriptions destroyed, and the stele covered with the Z symbol and the slogan "For DNR LNR." In August, the defaced parts of the monument were painted gray, leaving only an empty stele without inscriptions.[30] The fate of a memorial in Oleshky, Kherson region, displaying portraits of local ATO soldiers was similar: in May, the letters forming the word "Ukraine" were ripped out, the photographs were covered with paint, and the column with a trident was destroyed. In June, the memorial was dismantled entirely.[31] In Shevchenkove, Kharkhiv region, a granite trident was dislodged from a memorial to ATO fighters before the monument was removed entirely, on June 29.[32] What was destroyed when was sometimes dictated by the ebb and flow of attention to particular symbolic locations due to the commemorative calendar and propagandistic needs. In other cases, there seems to have been a desire to get rid of the most visible Ukrainian symbols first. Yet in general, the timing depended on logistics as much as on any thought-out program of Russification or (re-)Sovietization.

This incremental iconoclasm means that public space was not immediately wiped clean of symbols of Ukrainian statehood and memory. Emblems of the Russian conquest often co-existed with Ukrainian symbols for some time. On prominent war memorials, the latter were typically removed in time for the widely broadcast Victory Day celebrations on May 9; elsewhere they could remain in place even longer. The Kherson State Maritime Academy continued to display two ATO plaques until early June, even though Russian soldiers were housed there since March. Sometimes even commemorative events organized by the proxy authorities featured the colors of the Ukrainian flag.[33]

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30 https://t.me/hueviyherson/19919, June 4, 2022; fieldwork by Mykola Homanyuk and Olena Taskalina.

31 Personal communication from two residents of Oleshky.

32 Hanna Ts'omyk, "Kolaboranty u Shevchenkovomu na Kharkivshchyni khochuť znesty pam'iatnyk heroiam ATO," *Suspil'ne. Novyny*, June 29, 2022, https://suspilne.media/255195-kolaboranti-u-sevcenkovomu-na-harkivsini-hocut-znesti-pamatnik-geroam-ato; Daniil Petrov, "V Khar'kovskoi oblasti snesli pamiatnik voinam ATO," *Kommentarii.UA*, June 30, 2022, https://kharkov.comments.ua/news/war/2022/11984-v-harkovskoy-oblasti-snesli-pamyatnik-voinam-ato.html.

33 For an example, see Mykhailo Khomchenko, "Khersons'ki zradnyky za movchaznoï pidtrymky rashystiv provely mitynh z komunistychnoiu symvolikoiu," *depo Kherson*,

The gradual manner in which monuments were altered, removed, or destroyed reflects the shifts in Russian plans for the conquered territories. It was not until May–June 2022 that Russian discourse shifted from "de-Nazifying" the occupied parts of Ukraine to outright annexation.

Accordingly, the first layer of modifications often consisted of improvised additions. For instance, as late as the beginning of May, the main change at the Memorial Cemetery for soldiers of the Great Patriotic War in Kherson was the presence of two transparent sheet protectors with A4 printouts of the slogans "Khersonites remember the heroic deeds of the peoples of the USSR" and "Glory to the Soviet soldier."[34] In Bilozerka, Kherson region, an inscription on the local self-propelled artillery vehicle monument that said "Bilozerka is Ukraine" was initially altered to read "Bilozerka is NOT Ukraine," then painted over completely.[35]

Overall, the somewhat haphazard nature of the symbolic modifications of Ukrainian space is somewhat reminiscent of the Soviet occupation of new territories to the west of its borders in 1939–40. At the time, the Soviets destroyed a number of prominent monuments, built several new ones, and renamed places and streets, but they did so much less systematically than they would following the reconquest of these territories in 1944–45.[36]

Rhetorically, at least, the Russian-appointed administrators followed a pattern characteristic of iconoclastic movements through the ages. Iconoclasm has often consisted not in physically removing an image but in displacing it, thereby challenging its claim to represent something transcendent, such as God or historical truth. In their struggle against religion, the Bolsheviks transferred certain icons from churches and monasteries to museums, where they employed sophisticated technology to preserve them as works of art but by that very token denied them a religious significance.[37]

March 13, 2022, https://herson.depo.ua/ukr/herson/khersonski-zradniki-z-movchaznoi-pidtrimki-rashistiv-proveli-miting-z-komunistichnoyu-simvolikoyu-202203131433613.

34   https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6725, May 6, 2022, and Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

35   Personal communication from a resident of Bilozirka.

36   For the case of L'viv, see the Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine (TsDAHOU), f. 1 o. 30 spr. 1353 and spr. 1370 for monument removal as late as 1949. For the Estonian case, see the National Archive of Estonia (RA), file ERAF.5.5.65, sheets 26–29 (from 1945).

37   See Besançon, *L'image interdite*. On Bolshevik iconoclasm, see also the discussion in Antonova, *Visual Thought in Russian Religious Philosophy*, 69.

In several cases, removal was accompanied by a promise to display a monument in a museum or other supposedly more appropriate location instead of destroying it. This was the case, for example, with the Sahaidachnyi statue in Manhush, Donets'k region.[38] In Chornobaïvka, Kherson region, plaques to local ATO soldiers that had been added to a Great Patriotic War memorial were removed and replaced with a Victory Banner but not thrown away. Instead, they were installed across the street from a church, on a wall that used to display portraits of those honored for their contribution to socialist labor and now renamed a memorial to victims of what the Russian proxy mayor called Ukraine's "civil war."[39] However, this is the only case we have found where such an alternative display actually transpired, and in general, such comparatively conciliatory language was the exception rather than the norm. Especially on and around Victory Day, Russian propaganda descriptions of Ukrainian monuments typically employed scare quotes and derogatory language suggesting inauthenticity and ugliness, in contrast to the more familiar colors of the Soviet canon. Referring to monuments honoring Ukrainian resistance against Russia in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, one Russian journalist wrote:

> Of one of these creations [*izvaianie*], only the base remains. This protrusion supported an abstruse, oddly-shaped stone colored in bilious blue-and-yellow colors…. As May 9 draws nearer, the settlement assumes its natural colors. Saved from the hands of plunderers, the bas-relief on the Taras Shevchenko house of culture was restored and painted red.[40]

The Russian invaders were not radical iconoclasts; they were not motivated by the mistrust of images as such that has inspired image-breakers throughout the ages. Unlike the prophets Ibrahim, Musa, and Muhammad

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38 "V prigorode Mariupolia."

39 "S memoriala v Khersonskoi oblasti ubrali tablichki s ubitymi voennymi Ukrainy," *RIA Novosti*, May 8, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220508/memorial-1787561184.html.

40 "Vozvrashchenie domoi: Fotoreportazh iz Starobel'ska," *Krasnaia vesna*, May 4, 2022, https://rossaprimavera.ru/article/a45d4653. Conversely, Ukrainian media also sometimes placed the word "monument" in scare quotes when referring to monuments newly erected on Russian-occupied territory. For an example, see "V okkupirovannoi Volnovakhe otkryt 'pamiatnik' odnomu iz voennykh prestupnikov," *DonPress*, October 14, 2022, https://donpress.com/news/14-10-2022-v-okkupirovannoy-volnovakhe-otkryt-pamyatnik-odnomu-iz-voennykh-prestupnikov.

in Islamic tradition, they were not opposed to any and all politics grounded in images.[41] Yet like most of those who engage in the destruction of monuments, their objective was to restore an original purity—specifically, a familiar late Soviet configuration of monuments untainted by later additions and modifications.

Monuments spared

Amid the iconoclasm, some Ukrainian monuments were spared by the invaders even though they might have appeared to be obvious targets for destruction. In part, this had to do with the chronology and topography of the Russian advance. The Russian treatment of monuments in each location depended on the length of occupation and the city's size and importance. In places in, for example, the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions that were only occupied for a few weeks at most, the invaders did not get around to installing proxy civilian administrations and hardly had time for more than photo ops and haphazard damage to existing monuments.[42] In cities that were occupied for several months, such as Melitopol', Mariupol', and Kherson, they had more time to stage elaborate pro-Russian commemorative ceremonies and alter existing memorials or even build new ones. Yet their resources were stretched far too thin to do so in every location.

Proceeding along the highways, the Russian troops never established full control over the entire area they claimed to have conquered. In a number of districts located far from the main roads, we have found no evidence of modification of war memorials. Examples include the Ivanivka and Nyzhni Sirohozy municipalities in Kherson region, and the Svatove, Troïts'ke, and Nyzhnia Duvanka municipalities in Luhans'k region, each of which includes several villages. There were many cases when the composition of village councils did not change and Ukrainian flags stayed on public buildings, for example, in the Novotroïts'ke, Ivanivka, and Nyzhni Sirohozy municipalities in the Kherson region. Having traveled to Ivanivka in late August 2023, the Russian proxy governor, Volodymyr Sal'do, complained that Ukrainian symbols were still not removed—over

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41   Tugendhaft, *The Idols of ISIS*, 12–13.
42   Mykola Homanyuk's interviews on April 28, 2023, with Andrii Bohdan, the mayor of Horodnia, Chernihiv region, and Maryna Hal'ko, deputy head of the administration of Mykhailo-Kotsiubyns'ke, Chernihiv region.

a year and a half into the occupation.[43] (In addition, one might speculate that the far heavier presence of soldiers from the self-proclaimed Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics in the southern and eastern parts of the occupied regions aggravated the damage to ATO monuments in those areas. Separatists would have been more likely to have been involved in fighting the Ukrainian army since 2014 and would thus see monument destruction as an act of revenge.)

Accordingly, even in locations with a heavy and long-term Russian presence, not all memorials displaying Ukrainian symbols were targeted. Even in Kherson, a small memorial displaying a large Ukrainian trident was left untouched. Commemorating Volodymyr Kedrovs'kyi, a colonel for the Ukrainian People's Republic of 1917–1921, the granite slab was located near a Russian army checkpoint on a large road in a residential area and yet remained untouched throughout the occupation. Also in Kherson, several makeshift memorials to Territorial Defense (military reserve) fighters, in the form of crosses with blue-and-yellow ribbons tied to tree trunks, were created in spring 2022 close to the Buzkovyi Hai (Lilac Grove) site where they had died fighting the Russian army on March 1. They were adjacent to the above-mentioned ATO monument theatrically blown up by a supposed former Territorial Defense member. Yet the 2022 memorial remained unscathed throughout the occupation period. Another example is a memorial to local policemen killed in the line of duty since 1953. Located in central Kherson opposite what became a Russian military base following the occupation, the large memorial includes ATO volunteers among the dead it commemorates, including policemen such as Roman Nabehov and Ruslan Storcheus, whose individual memorials elsewhere in Kherson were destroyed. It also features several Ukrainian tridents. Nevertheless, the monument remained completely unaltered until mid-September, and even then the only modification was the removal of one trident (symbolizing the Ministry of the Interior) from the monument itself, with the plaques left intact.[44]

The decision to spare these monuments appears to stem from a sense of corporate identification. The Russian invaders, many of whom have a past or present association with Russia's Ministry of the Interior, appear to identify with fellow law enforcement professionals even if they served Ukraine, leading them to spare monuments that commemorate policemen

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43 https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/1137, August 29, 2023.
44 Mykola Homanyuk's field observations.

through their professional identity rather than their participation in military conflict with Russia. They also seem to regard men drafted into the Territorial Defense forces as legitimate soldiers who had no choice but to fight, unlike ATO volunteers they see as ideological nationalists. The way in which corporate identity can trump national divisions could also be seen in certain ceremonies, especially on some of the many professional holidays rooted in late Soviet tradition.[45] Thus, in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, there were reports of residents being shot in the streets for wearing ribbons in the colors of the Ukrainian flag.[46] Yet participants in a Russian-sanctioned procession on Russia's Border Guard Day carried a variety of different flags, including one with the emblem of the Ukrainian border guard service, and some of them were wearing Ukrainian uniforms.[47]

While rare, there may also have been cases in which ATO memorials were spared by Russian military commanders out of a sense of respect for the other side's dead.[48] Another explanation referred to Russian soldiers' biographical connections with Ukraine, generating urban legends similar to those circulating during and after the Second World War about why certain German towns were spared from Allied bombing. Two administrators of liberated towns in Chernihiv region stated that some Russian fighter pilots were dropping their bombs in the surrounding forests instead of Chernihiv or other towns in the region because they had trained at the Chernihiv Higher Military Aviation School of Pilots. By extension, this would also have been why they spared Ukrainian war memorials.[49]

Another memorial somewhat unexpectedly spared during the occupation was one commemorating Stalin's 1944 deportation of the Crimean Tatars from their homeland in Crimea. The first such memorial in Ukraine

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45 Catriona Kelly and Svetlana Sirotinina, "'I Didn't Understand It, But It Was Funny': Late Soviet Festivals and Their Impact on Children," *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, no. 5 (2009): 254–300.

46 "'Mozhuť rozstriliaty za syn'o-zhovtu strichku': pro te, iak zhyve Melitopoľ pid rosiis'koiu okupatsiieiu," *Radio Svoboda*, July 14, 2022, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/novyny-pryazovya-melitopol-okupatsiya/31942189.html.

47 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7821, May 28, 2022.

48 This is how Ukrainian politician and battalion commander Petro Kuzyk interprets a case of limited damage to a memorial that he encountered on the front line: Islnd TV, "Kuzyk: pravda pro Bakhmut, bataľion 'Svoboda', okopni boï, pekeľna TRO, piar na trupakh," Antypody, Youtube video, 51:06 [35:26–36:30], March 18, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_9OCyvBIes.

49 Mykola Homanyuk's interviews on April 28, 2023, with Andrii Bohdan, the mayor of Horodnia, Chernihiv region, and Maryna Hal'ko, deputy head of the administration of Mykhailo-Kotsiubyns'ke, Chernihiv region.

outside of Crimea, it was installed in Kherson in 2019 to mark the 75th anniversary of the deportation. (The small memorial was later destroyed by artillery fire in April 2023.)[50] We can only speculate why the Russian forces initially left the monument untouched, but their actions appear to echo the management of memorials to the deportation in occupied Crimea. While at least one such memorial, located outside Sevastopol', was destroyed by unknown vandals on Victory Day 2019, just three days after it was erected,[51] the occupation authorities have sponsored or approved the creation of several Crimean Tatar monuments, such as a statue of the activist Reşid Mediyev (1880–1912) in Bilohirs'k and a deportation memorial in Süren (now Syren') near Bakhchysarai, one of the largest deportation terminals in 1944.[52] The reasons for this support are complex, but they probably include a desire to divert attention from damage done to Crimean Tatar heritage in Crimea, such as the Khan's Palace in Bakhchysarai,[53] and from the way the Crimean Tatars have been demoted from their status as an indigenous people, which they had been guaranteed under Ukrainian law.[54]

Monuments stolen

Another way in which the Russians interacted with monuments was by stealing them. The looting of cultural heritage is usually discussed either in the context of European overseas colonialism or of expansionist mil-

50 Mykola Homanyuk's field observations. On the creation of the memorial, see "V Khersone otkryli pamiatnik zhertvam genotsida krymskotatarskogo naroda," *ATR*, May 18, 2019, https://atr.ua/news/186713-v-hersone-otkryli-pamatnik-zertvam-genocida-krymskota-tarskogo-naroda.

51 "Vandals Smash New Monument To Crimean Tatar WWII Victims," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 9, 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/newly-installed-monument-to-crime-an-tatar-wwii-victims-vandalized/29931904.html.

52 "V Belogorske ustanovili pamiatnik krymskotatarskomu politiku Abdureshidu Medi-evu," *Krym.Realii*, October 18, 2021, https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-krym-krymskiye-ta-tary-pamyatnik-mediyevu-belogorsk/31516533.html; "Piať let podriad: kak stroiat me-morial v pamiať o zhertvakh deportatsii na stantsii Siuren'," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 17, 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/photo-memorialnyy-kompleks-v-pamyat-o-zhertvakh-deportatsii/31259106.html.

53 UkrInform, "Russian Invaders Destroy Golden Cabinet in Khan's Palace in Occupied Crimea," *Kyiv Post*, December 17, 2022, https://www.kyivpost.com/post/5850.

54 "V Krymu s pamiatnika zhertvam deportatsii potrebovali ubrať slovo 'korennoi': Rech'idet o krymskikh tatarakh," *Idel'.Realii*, November 19, 2021, https://www.idelreal.org/a/31569626.html. We thank Mariia Shynkarenko for sharing these sources about the Bilohirs'k and Süren monuments as well as her interpretation with us.

itary campaigns such as those of the Second World War.[55] In addition to countless easily transportable cultural artifacts, Europeans also brought large monuments to imperial capitals, from the Luxor Obelisk installed in Paris in the 1830s to the Pergamon Altar, taken to Berlin bit by bit later in the nineteenth century.

To the extent that any justifications were provided at the time of removal or in more recent restitution debates, they often came in technical guise, claiming that the artifacts had been unearthed by Western archaeologists, that they had been gifted or sold to Europeans by locals, or that European countries could take better care of the objects than the countries of origin. Other arguments, however, have sought to establish lines of continuity suggesting that present-day imperial powers, rather than local residents, were the rightful heirs to the creators of an artifact. The typical narrative of Western Civilization, traced from Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Biblical origins to modern Western Europe and North America, implied that Westerners—rather than the supposedly culturally backward modern residents of Iraq, the Levant, Egypt, or Greece—were the legitimate proprietors of ancient monuments, created by "their" (cultural or spiritual) ancestors.

Arguments of this kind have long featured in the history of Russian imperial expansion. Styling itself the Third Rome and the true heir to Byzantium as guardian of the Orthodox realms, elites in the Russian Empire regularly revived fantasies of capturing Istanbul, the former Constantinople, from the Ottomans. In the nineteenth century, in declaring themselves protectors of the Orthodox citizens of the Ottoman Empire, they would often justify military intervention by pointing to the presence of churches and monasteries on which the Eastern Slavs had modeled their own sacred buildings and which could thus be portrayed as cradles of Russian civilization.

An even longer tradition of relocation revolves around the afterlives of human remains. In the Christian and, to some extent, in the Islamic world, for a long time, saints' relics were transported to capture part of the sanctity associated with them. Yet the location of relics, and more generally of burial sites, has also long been a matter of constructing continuity across

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55 Isabelle Dolezalek, Bénédicte Savoy, and Robert Skwirblies, eds., *Beute: Eine Anthologie zu Kunstraub und Kulturerbe* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021); Merten Lagatz, Bénédicte Savoy, and Philippa Sissis, eds., *Beute: Ein Bildatlas zu Kunstraub und Kulturerbe* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021).

time and space. Just as monasteries and shrines have long had a geopolitical significance, both the Russian Empire and its successors, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, have long used soldiers' graves, memorials, and monuments to stake out geopolitical claims and embody narratives of continuity. Thus, during the Second World War, the Red Army and its political commissars rediscovered many Tsarist-era war memorials in places as diverse as Ukraine, Estonia, Germany, Poland, or Bulgaria, and typically built new memorials next to them to draw a line of continuity between military exploits old and new. However, when the Soviet Union took cultural artifacts from German territory, this was understood as exacting reparations for earlier German looting of Soviet heritage rather than as repatriating items that had always belonged to Russia.[56]

In the Russian occupation of Ukraine, things were different. Looting was endemic, responding to the dual desire to deny Ukraine a claim to its cultural heritage and to declare that heritage Russian.[57] Soviet-era war memorials were not spared such reinterpretation. Thus, in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, following the city's liberation in the fall of 1943, a T-70 tank was installed on a pedestal over a communal grave. In April 2023, the Russian occupiers declared they would restore the tank to let it participate in a Victory Day parade; when they found out it had no engine, they took it to Saint Petersburg instead, claiming to prepare it for another parade in Melitopol' in October.[58]

When withdrawing from Kherson, along with countless artifacts from the Regional History and Arts Museums, the occupiers also removed four monuments as well as the bones of the city's founder, Prince Grigorii Potemkin. The Russians had identified the monuments—statues of Potemkin and Admiral Fedor Ushakov as well as busts of General

56 On the German-Russian restitution debate in European context, see the special thematic issue "Kunst im Konflikt: Kriegsfolgen und Kooperationsfelder in Europa," in *Osteuropa* 56, no. 1/2 (2006).

57 Jeffrey Gettleman and Oleksandra Mykolyshyn, "As Russians Steal Ukraine's Art, They Attack Its Identity, Too," *New York Times*, January 14, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/14/world/asia/ukraine-art-russia-steal.html; "'Iakby ne kolaboranty, my by vriatuvaly muzei vid rosiian': Interviu z dyrektorkoiu Khersons'koho khudozhn'oho muzeiiu," *Ukraïns'ka pravda*, November 12, 2022, https://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2022/11/12/251267.

58 "V Melitopole okkupanty ukrali s postamenta tank T-70: uvorovannyi eksponat 'zasvetilsia' v RF," *Fokus*, May 30, 2023, https://focus.ua/voennye-novosti/569400-v-melitopole-okkupanty-ukrali-s-postamenta-tank-t-70-uvorovannyj-eksponat-zasvetilsya-v-rf-video.

Aleksandr Suvorov and Soviet general Vasyl' Marhelov (Vasilii Margelov in Russian)—early on as important parts of the local heritage that they laid claim to as embodiments of the city's Russian past.[59] Representing three eighteenth-century military leaders and one from the Second World War, the monuments were among the city's most iconic war memorials and also—contested—embodiments of local identity.

As the Russian troops were preparing to abandon Kherson, a Russian nationalist politician included the monuments in a list of cultural heritage that he recommended the army take with them.[60] Sure enough, two days later, Russian proxy administrators declared that they, as well as the remains of Potemkin's body, had been "evacuated" from the city and transported to the Russian-controlled left bank of the Dnipro.[61]

The occupiers' logic was particularly twisted. Along with three other regions, Kherson region had been declared part of Russia just three weeks earlier following sham referendums. For Russian propaganda, this automatically made all local cultural heritage Russian and therefore in need of protection from Ukraine. The larger claim, of course, was that Kherson's monuments had been Russian all along. Their removal implied that Ukraine had somehow stolen these monuments simply by becoming independent, or at least by daring to use its sovereignty to make decisions that did not align with (retrospective) Russian preferences. Likening the Potemkin statue to a traveling potentate, proxy governor Volodymyr Sal'do quipped: "Let him look not only at Kherson, but at the entire Kherson region."[62]

Sal'do's attempts to justify the theft of the statues mirrored the general difficulty the occupiers had building a coherent discourse about the continuity of the region's supposed Russian identity across the Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. Originally built in 1836, the Potemkin statue was moved to the courtyard of the regional history museum in 1927 under the Bolsheviks and later vanished during the Second World War. A modified copy was installed in 2003 under Sal'do's mayorship of Kherson. Thus the restoration of a supposed symbol of the city's Russianness had taken

59 "Istoricheskoe nasledie," *Naddneprianskaia pravda*, June 29, 2022—the very first issue of the occupation newspaper.

60 https://t.me/grigorov_prav/2151, October 22, 2022.

61 https://t.me/stranaua/71566, October 24, 2022; Alëna Busalaeva, "Iz Ekaterininskogo sobora v Khersone vyvezli moshchi Potëmkina, - Sal'do," *Krym24*, October 26, 2022, https://crimea24tv.ru/content/iz-ekaterininskogo-sobora-v-khersone-v/.

62 Busalaeva, "Iz Ekaterininskogo sobora."

place in independent Ukraine, rather than in the Soviet period that the occupiers usually claimed they wanted to revert back to. And yet Sal'do focused on this monument rather than the Soviet-era Ushakov monument and the Suvorov bust. The bust of Soviet general Marhelov, likewise, had been put up in independent Ukraine (in 2010) and thus did not fit the narrative about "Russian heritage."[63]

In a sense, Sal'do's arguments echoed those of earlier colonial invaders in denying Ukrainians the right to manage monuments on their own territory as they see fit. They also betrayed a sense of personal ownership: since the Potemkin statue had been erected during his tenure as mayor, he implied, he had a personal right to decide its fate. Looting was equated with preservation, on the assumption that Ukraine might want to remove those monuments in acts of de-Russification and decommunization, but of course these policies themselves were responses to Russian aggression (see chapter 6).

Thus, for all of Russia's portrayal of itself as a victim of Western imperialism, its treatment of monuments in Ukraine was itself resolutely imperialist. Other post-Soviet countries, such as Armenia, have tapped into the twenty-first-century global restitution debate. Engaging in what Adam T. Smith has called "a deft sublimation of irredentism into the far more subtle lexicon of global cultural heritage, of landscape into materiality," they have asked for the restitution of objects that cannot be traced to their current national territory, in a bid to further their irredentist claims to other regions.[64] Russia, by contrast, has as it were moved back into the nineteenth century.[65] It deploys an exclusively imperialist repertoire, creating facts on the ground by destroying, altering, or moving objects of material heritage as it pleases and drawing on symbols of its own prior imperial rule.

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63   "V Khersone otkryli pamiatnik glavnomu desantniku generalu Margelovu—legendarnomu Diade Vase," *Tsenzor.NET*, February 22, 2010, https://censor.net/ru/photo_news/113833/v_hersone_otkryli_pamyatnik_glavnomu_desantniku_generalu_margelovu__legendarnomu_dyade_vase_fotore.

64   Adam T. Smith, "Heritage, Irredentism, Materiality," *Assemblages: Things, Places, and the Archaeology of Eurasia* (blog), March 19, 2012, https://blogs.cornell.edu/adamtsmith/2012/03/19/heritage-irredentism-materiality/.

65   Here we echo Georgiy Kasianov's observations about the historical roots of Russia's current politics of history: Georgiy Kasianov, "Ukraine: When Tensions over the Past Morph into War," in *A New Global Order? History and Power Politics in the Era of Zeitenwende*, History Hotspot (Hamburg: Körber Stiftung, 2022), 5–6.