

Chapter 4

Monuments (Re-)Built

Where Ukrainian decommunization had removed Soviet-era monuments and replaced them with new ones, the invaders were not always content with getting rid of the Ukrainian memorials. Echoing the restorationist justification for invasion, they set about restoring some Soviet monuments.

In doing so, the Russian occupiers proclaimed that the recent past had been an aberration. Now Russia was back to turn things back to normal. However, their conception of what was normal remained hazy in both content and chronology. Rhetorically, they situated the golden age either before the Revolution of Dignity of 2014 or before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, knocking down, altering, or replacing Ukrainian monuments never resulted in a return to the previous state. Instead, the Russians always ended up creating something previously unseen: new, differently shaped Lenin statues replaced those removed by Ukrainians; eternal flames were lit at war memorials where none had burned before; and polychrome monuments were presented as evidence of Russian care. Statues and portraits of figures from Russian history went up in places those figures had no connection with, and Soviet Victory banners were hoisted alongside Russian flags and stylized portraits of Jesus Christ.

This reflected the syncretism of historical culture in present-day Russia, where nostalgia for past greatness tends to throw together seemingly incompatible symbols dating from different periods of Russian and Soviet history. Yet their policy also followed the peculiar tradition of Russian heritage management. The historian Julie Deschepper has argued that the Bolsheviks developed an approach to built heritage that often involved destroying material objects in order to rebuild them bet-

ter.¹ This approach was applied to countless local war memorials in western parts of the Soviet Union, knocked down in the 1960s to make way for “artistically superior” structures.² It was also in evidence in Russia’s post-Soviet wars: in Chechnya, Russian troops devastated entire city blocks during hostilities, then Russian companies secured commissions to build supposedly more beautiful quarters.³ In Syria, in turn, the now Moscow-aligned Chechnya engaged in the same type of reconstruction following a war in which Russia behaved in similarly destructive fashion.⁴ Starting in 2022, the same policy was implemented in Ukrainian Mariupol’, devastated by the brutal Russian onslaught.

This chapter explores Russia’s monument (re)building policies in occupied Ukraine and their contradictions.

LENIN’S RETURN

Several Lenin statues or busts that had been taken down in what became known as the Leninfall⁵ went back up: for instance, in Heniches’k, Nova

1 Deschepper, “Between Future and Eternity.” See also her forthcoming book: Deschepper, *Le temps du patrimoine soviétique. Une histoire matérielle de la Russie*.

2 The example of Moldova is documented in a report from October 1963 about the state of war graves in the republic: ANA-DAOSP (National Archives Agency of Moldova, Directorate of Socio-Political Organizations) F. 51 i. 23 d. 27 f. 27–30.

3 Musa Basnukaev, “Reconstruction in Chechnya: At the Intersection between Politics and the Economy,” in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huérou et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 76–89.

4 Frederick Deknatel, “Reconstruction, Who Decides?,” in *Cultural Heritage and Mass Atrocities*, ed. James Cuno and Thomas G. Weiss (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2022), 220–37.

5 On Lenin statues in Ukraine and the Leninfall, see especially Oleksandra Gaidai’s studies: Oleksandra Gaidai, “Memorialization of Lenin: Legislation and Attitudes (On the Materials of Kyiv, Vinnytsia and Cherkasy Regions),” *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, no. 2 (2015): 137–54; Oleksandra Haidai [Gaidai], *Kamianyhi hist. Lenin u Tsentralnii Ukraïni. Vydannia druhe* (Kyiv: K.I.S., 2018); Oleksandra Gaidai, “Leninfall in Ukraine: How Did the Lenin Statues Disappear?,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 38, no. 1/2 (2021): 45–70; Oleksandra Gaidai, “‘Take Me to a Mausoleum’: Coping with Lenin’s Statue in Poltava,” in *The Political Cult of the Dead in Ukraine: Traditions and Dimensions from the First World War to Today*, ed. Guido Hausmann and Iryna Sklokina (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2021), 223–37. On the case of Poltava, see also Lina Klymenko, “Choosing Mazepa Over Lenin: The Transformation of Monuments and Political Order in Post-Maidan Ukraine,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 5 (2020): 815–36. For interpretations of the wider cultural meanings of the Leninfall, see Serhii Plokhii, “Goodbye Lenin: A Memory Shift in Revolutionary Ukraine (Working Paper),” November 2018, <https://gis.huri.harvard.edu/files/leninfallpaper.pdf>; Anastasiya Pshenychnykh, “Leninfall: The Spectacle of Forgetting,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020): 393–414. Dominique Colas, *Poutine, l’Ukraine et les statues de*

Kakhovka, and Hornostaïvka, Kherson region; in Melitopol' and the village of Dolyns'ke, Zaporizhzhia region; in at least one place in Kharkiv region; and in a number of places across the newly occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Tatiana Zhurzhenko has noted the irony of the Russian invaders reerecting Lenin statues even though Vladimir Putin had blamed Lenin for creating what he described as the state of Ukraine in his speech justifying the invasion.⁶ Whereas in some locations toppled Lenins were taken back out of storage, in other cases the statues were made from scratch and struck new poses.⁷

In keeping with Lenin's role as a symbol of nostalgia for the late Soviet period, the monuments were often installed on or around dates from the Soviet festive calendar, whose importance has receded in post-Soviet times not only in Ukraine but also in Russia, especially International Workers' Day (May 1) and October Revolution Day (November 7).⁸ Other

Lénine (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2023), provides broad historical context and also discusses some of the developments since 2022. On the Soviet-era construction of statues of Lenin and other communist leaders, as well as early post-Soviet iconoclasm, see Bogdan S. Tscherkes, "Denkmäler von Führern des sowjetischen Kommunismus in der Ukraine," in *Bildersturm in Osteuropa: die Denkmäler der kommunistischen Ära im Umbruch: eine Tagung des Deutschen Nationalkomitees von ICOMOS, des Instituts für Auslandsbeziehungen und der Senatsverwaltung Berlin in der Botschaft der Russischen Föderation in Berlin, 18.–20. Februar 1993*, ed. Florian Fiedler and Michael Petzet, ICOMOS—Hefte des deutschen Nationalkomitees, XIII (Munich: Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, 1994), 39–45. On vandalism of OUN/UPA monuments in response to attacks on Soviet monuments such as Lenin statues, see Myshlovska, "The Sacralization of the Ukrainian Statehood," 269–70.

- 6 Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Terror, Kollaboration und Widerstand: Russlands Herrschaft in den neu besetzten Gebieten der Ukraine," *Osteuropa*, nos. 6–8 (2022): 190.
- 7 Julie Deschepper, "Le retour de Lénine ou la militarisation de l'histoire," AOC, August 5, 2022, <https://aoc.media/analyse/2022/05/08/le-retour-de-lenine-ou-la-militarisation-de-lhistoire>.
- 8 "V Genicheske vosstanavlivaiut pamiatnik Leninu," *Kherson.life*, April 18, 2022, <https://kherson.life/kherson/v-genicheske-vosstanavlivayut-pamyatnik-leninu-foto/>; Aleksandr Grishin, "V ukrainskom Genicheske vernuli na mesto pamiatnik Leninu, a nad zdaniem administratsii povესili rossiiskii flag," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, April 18, 2022, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27380/4574651/>; "V Melitopole vernuli na prezhnnee mesto pamiatnik Leninu," TASS, November 5, 2022, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/16253859>; "V s. Dolinskoe Berdianskogo r-n Zaporozhskoi oblasti mestnye zhiteli ustanovili na prezhnnee mesto pamiatnik Leninu," *Lenta novosti Zaporozh'ia*, November 7, 2022, <https://zp-news.ru/society/2022/11/07/54864.html>; "Okkupanty vernuli v Svetlodarsk snesennogo 9 let nazad Lenina," *Tsenzor.NET*, December 3, 2022, https://censor.net/ru/photo_news/3384607/okkupanty_vernuli_v_svetlodarsk_snesennogo_9_let_nazad_lenina_foto; "V Novoi Kakhovke vernuli pamiatnik Leninu," *Moskva24*, May 1, 2022, <https://www.m24.ru/vid-eos/za-rubezhom/01052022/457233>.

dates chosen for such ceremonies were Lenin's birthday and the 100th anniversary of the creation of the USSR.⁹

In a school in the Kharkiv region, the occupiers put up a new Lenin bust before the end of the summer vacation, proclaiming that pupils would start the new school year as in Soviet times, "wearing red scarves."¹⁰ In Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, the occupation administration reattached an outsized Order of Lenin and a commemorative plaque to an obelisk erected in 1968 for the 50th anniversary of the Communist Youth League; a few months later, it restored a Lenin bust next to it.¹¹ In Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia region, there was a Soviet-era placeholder monument to Red Army soldiers executed by Baron Petr Wrangel's White Army in 1920. After 2015, plaques with the Ukrainian flag and trident and a dedication to an unspecified group of "the dead" were attached to it, covering up the previous (Ukrainian-language) inscription. The Russians removed those plaques to uncover the previous inscription.¹²

In addition to decommunization, some monuments had suffered as a result of fighting, both before and after February 24, 2022. In 2003, Ukraine's president Leonid Kuchma and Moscow's mayor Iurii Luzhkov had jointly opened a monument to Prince Ihor', the protagonist of the famous medieval epic *The Lay of Ihor's Host*, in Stanyts'ia Luhans'ka, Luhans'k region. Unveiled on the 65th anniversary of the establishment of Luhans'k region, the monument also marked the opening of a new highway and was installed high on a mound. In 2014, the area became part of the so-called contact line between Ukrainian and Russian forces, and the complex was heavily damaged by shelling. In November 2022, Russian state media announced that they had rebuilt the monument, which they claimed had been "barbarously subjected to heavy fire" and "deliberately

9 Iuliia Mikhailova, "Luganskaia oblast': V Starobel'ske vosstanovlen pamiatnik V.I. Leninu," *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, December 7, 2022, <https://kprf.ru/international/ussr/215082.html>.

10 "Okkupanty ustanovili v litsee na Khar'kovshchine biust Lenina," *Kharkiv Today*, August 20, 2022, <https://2day.kh.ua/ru/kharkov/okkupanty-ustanovili-v-licee-na-khar-kovshchine-byust-lenina>.

11 "Torzhestvennoe otkrytie vosstanovlennogo obeliska Komsomol'skoi Slavy proshlo v Starobel'ske," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 9, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/torzhestvennoe-otkrytie-vosstanovlennogo-obeliska-komsomol-skoj-slavy-proshlo-v-starobel-ske>; Mikhailova, "Luganskaia oblast'."

12 https://t.me/v_and_z/842, June 4, 2022.

destroyed in the course of an eight-year war” by the Ukrainian side.¹³ To illustrate the narrative of continuity between Prince Ihor’s campaign against the Polovtsians in 1185 and the reconquest of Luhans’k region, they drew cartoonlike symbols of the 2022 invasion on the monument: an armed soldier with a Z symbol, a tank displaying a gonfalon flag of Christ, and two combat drones.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the type of memorial renovated by far the most frequently and with the greatest fanfare were monuments to the Great Patriotic War.

“EIGHT (THIRTY?) YEARS OF NEGLECT”

One of the claims consistently repeated in Russian propaganda texts and videos and in speeches at commemorative ceremonies concerned Ukraine’s alleged hostility toward Great Patriotic War and other military memorials. A week into the invasion, a Russian propaganda website posted a text titled “A complex matter explained in simple terms: Russia’s aims and tasks in the operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine,” which was later republished countless times as a justification for the invasion, including on the websites of Russian educational institutions and municipalities. Among other points, it stated that “the denazification of Ukraine aims to secure a rejection by Ukraine’s current leadership of vandalism—the destruction of numerous memorials to soldiers and officers of the Soviet Army who liberated Ukraine from the German fascist invaders during the Great Patriotic War.”¹⁵

The Russian invaders frequently repeated the assertion that, during the eight years since the Euromaidan or even the three decades since Ukraine’s independence, the country’s authorities had neglected such

13 “VLNR otkryli vosstanovlennyy memorial ‘Kniaz’ Igor’,” *RIA Novosti*, November 21, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20221121/memorial-1833069491.html>; “Vossozdannyi pamiatnik kniazuiu Ig-oriu otkryt v stanitse Luganskoi v LNR,” *Pervyi kanal*, November 21, 2022, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2022-11-21/441971-vossozdannyi_pamyatnik_knyazyu_igoryu_otkryt_v_stanitse_luganskoy_v_lnr.

14 “BLA “Geran” stanoviatsia chast’iu kul’tury,” *Lenta novostei Luganska*, November 24, 2022, <https://lugansk-news.ru/society/2022/11/24/33529.html>.

15 Zakhar Vinogradov, “Prosto o slozhnom: Tseli i zadachi Rossii v operatsii po demilitarizatsii i denatsifikatsii Ukrainy,” *Ukraina.ru*, March 3, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220303151345/https://ukraina.ru/exclusive/20220303/1033432311.html>.

memorials, that they had actively prevented local residents from maintaining them and performing commemorative ceremonies, or, worst of all, had deliberately removed or destroyed such monuments or tacitly supported activists engaged in such destruction. In the words of an official of the occupation administration in Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region, quoted in a propaganda newspaper: “It is very important that today in our towns we can peacefully celebrate and commemorate our heroes and conduct events by the eternal flame and monuments to the Great Patriotic War, and that nobody prevents us from doing so.”¹⁶ Volodymyr Sal’do, the Russian-appointed Kherson regional governor, proclaimed that “we are once again restoring historical justice, the memory they tried to take from us.”¹⁷ In the Russian narrative, liberation from the Ukrainian yoke finally made people free to follow their dreams of renovating war memorials: “The community project ‘Young Builders of Kherson’ emerged almost spontaneously: the youngsters came forward to offer their help in restoring the city’s derelict monuments.”¹⁸

The timeframe given for the supposed period of neglect, obstruction, and memory theft was hazy. Sometimes it was vaguely referred to as “so many years of anti-Russian propaganda, intimidation, and terror.”¹⁹ One Russian collaborator stated that Great Patriotic War memorials were still maintained under President Viktor Ianukovych, but “under Zelens’kyi, during the three-four years that he has been around, nobody is taking care of them, the authorities have no need for this.”²⁰

Most frequently, the start of the period to be repudiated was dated to 2014 or soon thereafter. A widely circulated Russian newspaper claimed outright that in 2022, “Victory Day will be celebrated in Ukraine for the first time in seven years.”²¹ In one video from an unnamed village in the Luhans’k region, a resident claimed that after 2014, people were full of

16 “Pochtili pamiat’ pogibshikh v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine,” *Tavrisheskie vesti* 9(70), June 20–29, 2022.

17 “‘U nas est’ pravo vosstanovit’ istoricheskuiu spravedlivost’—v Khersone proshel Den’ pamiati i skorbi,” *Lenta novosti Khersona*, June 22, 2022, <https://kherson-news.ru/society/2022/06/22/8700.html>.

18 “Dan’ pamiati,” *Naddneprianskaia pravda*, July 21, 2022.

19 Aleksandr Egorov, *Den’ Pobedy na Dnepre* (Spas: Glavnoe s Annoi Shafran, 2022), <https://web.archive.org/web/20220520021240/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQnoKsaHloU>, 6:40.

20 https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022, at 1:15.

21 Irina Gerts, “Na Ukraine vpervye za sem’ let otmetiat Den’ Pobedy,” *Komsomol’skaia pravda. Spetsialnyi vypusk: Den’ Pobedy!*, May 7, 2022.

fear when celebrating Victory Day at the local memorial.²² In another video showing the removal of symbols and portraits from a memorial to the Heavenly Hundred in central Kherson, the commentator mentions that the monument used to display portraits of heroes of labor. In 2014, he continues, it was defiled when Ukrainians decided to use it for portraits of people used as cannon fodder in a civil war, forcing locals to worship them, and hoisted an EU flag, which is “a symbol of war, a symbol of murderers.”²³ The Russian forces later used the monument to display portraits of Great Patriotic War heroes from Kherson and the colors of the St. George’s Ribbon (see chapter 7 on this Russian symbol of war memory).²⁴

Yet frequently, Russian propagandists referred to the entire period of Ukrainian independence as a dark age. Local residents, one video claimed, had waited for Russia’s return for 30 years: “30 years of division and zombification, 30 years of nationalism and Russophobia.”²⁵ In one video from Beryslav, Kherson region, a man presented as a local volunteer who had started maintaining a local tank monument on his own stated that “the population has degraded completely over these 30 years, not just for eight years. Over the past eight years, the degradation has just become stronger.” He claimed that he had wanted to take care of the memorial “over the past eight years” but was afraid to do so because of “the state apparatus that was purposefully getting rid of all those it disliked” and that the police and SBU security services would have “tied” him “hand and foot” to prevent him from doing so.²⁶

When no evidence of actual change in local commemorative practices could be detected, the 2022 shift was construed as a purely emotional one, from insincere to authentic memory. Thus, a priest interviewed for a propaganda video about Victory Day in Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia region, stated that in previous years, “unfortunately these words had very often been a mere formality,” whereas “now we truly feel how important this is.”²⁷ It is only now that “the traditions of honoring the memory of one’s ances-

²² https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6733, May 6, 2022.

²³ https://t.me/kherson_non_fake/694, April 11, 2022.

²⁴ Mykola Homanyuk’s field observations and photos.

²⁵ Egortsev, *Den’ Pobedy na Dnepre*, 11:05 and 12:20.

²⁶ https://t.me/shot_shot/39151, May 4, 2022.

²⁷ https://t.me/v_and_z/570, May 8, 2022. In fact, the visibly nervous priest, perhaps speaking under duress, appeared to phrase his message in a deliberately ambiguous way. While he suggested that the previous period was marked by insincere commemoration, the “it”

tors are being restored in Kherson region,” a propaganda video claimed in the runup to Army Day 2023.²⁸

Russian media also frequently reported on the removal and alterations of war monuments in unoccupied Ukraine (as well as other Central and East European countries) since February 24. Presenting such actions as “aggressive de-Russification,”²⁹ they systematically omitted to mention that they were a response to the Russian attack. They also emphasized real or imagined damage done to monuments since the start of the full-scale invasion in areas then captured by Russian troops. Thus, after the devastating Russian onslaught on Mariupol’, Donetsk region, a Russian news agency claimed that Ukrainian “nationalists” had deliberately shot at a bronze bust of World War II-era Rear Admiral Mykola Lunin, targeting one of his medals (no evidence of damage was provided).³⁰

The chronology of the Great Patriotic War could also be hazy, as the Russians’ local collaborators were sometimes slow to switch to the standardized Russian discourse about the war. Thus, the Russian-appointed head of the administration of Hola Prystan’, Kherson region, stated that his grandparents went through “the entire Great Patriotic War from 1939 to 1945,” which he said had touched the family of every Ukrainian. He was clearly influenced by the recent official shift in Ukraine to talking about Ukrainian victims during the entire period of the Second World War rather than just the Great Patriotic War, whose beginning Soviet and Russian tradition dates to 1941. He then went on to agree with the interviewer’s claim that the Ukrainian authorities had been removing monuments to heroes of the Great Patriotic War.³¹

The main problem with such claims was the overwhelming evidence that Great Patriotic War memorials had not only been left standing but that the vast majority of them—including the Beryslav tank monument—

in his words referred to “a peaceful sky above our heads” and could be understood as a simple desire for peace, as a lesson learned from the Second World War.

²⁸ https://t.me/tavriya_kherson/4087, February 22, 2023, 2:07.

²⁹ “Na Ukraine prodolzhaetsia demontazh pamiatnikov, svyazannykh s rossiiskoi istoriei i kul’turoi,” *Podmoskov’e segodnia*, April 22, 2022, <https://mosregtoday.ru/culture/na-ukraine-prodolzhaetsya-demontazh-pamyatnikov-svyazannyh-s-rossiyskoy-istoriey-i-kul-turoy/>.

³⁰ “V Mariupole ukrainskie boeviki povredili pamiatnik Geroiu Sovetskogo Soiuza,” *RIA Novosti*, June 4, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220604/mariupol-1793145595.html>.

³¹ “Rol’ mestnogo samoupravleniia v novykh usloviakh. Neprostoie vremia trebueta neprostrykh reshenii. Interv’iu s glavoi Golopristsanskoi administratsii Nedialkovym Gennadiem Georgievichem,” *Golopristsanskii vestnik*, July–August 2022.

were actually well-maintained.³² Upon discovering intact war memorials, Russians who had believed their own country's propaganda sometimes appeared sincerely surprised.³³

In the face of this, Russian propagandists sometimes opted for a rhetoric of popular resistance against Ukrainianization and de-Sovietization: "Having visited several localities, we saw that the monuments are in good condition. This attests that, despite the position of the official Kyiv authorities, people are finding the time and are willing and able to take care of memorials and uphold the historical truth about the Great Patriotic War."³⁴

Despite assertions about unleashing war memory, the occupation did not necessarily lead to more commemorative activity. In some cases, events were actually toned down. Thus, the village of Berezhanka, Verkhnirohachyts'kyi district, Kherson region, in 2021 had seen an elaborate and centrally organized Victory Day ceremony attended by the entire student body of the local school; in 2022, the event was self-organized and much smaller.³⁵

Some brief online research usually suffices to debunk Russian claims about Ukrainian mistreatment of Great Patriotic War memorials. In most cases, it is easy to find photos of these monuments in good condition before February 24, 2022, and videos of commemorative ceremonies that involve them. A series of propaganda videos from Velyka Bilozerka, Zaporizhzhia region, provides a particularly egregious example. The Velyka Bilozerka memorial was the site of the 2018 ceremony mentioned in chapter 2 as a typical example of a hybrid yet respectful commemorative ceremony involving participants from Russia. One of the Russian videos shows an excur-

32 Photos from 2017 show the monument in good condition, with recent paint and a wreath in the colors of the Ukrainian flag: "Pamiatnik tank T-34-85 na postamente v g. Berislav," *Shukach*, June 14, 2017, <https://www.shukach.com/ru/node/56606>.

33 Interviewed by Mykola Homanyuk on April 28, 2023, Andrii Bohdan, the mayor of Horodnia, Chernihiv region, recalled the surprise of an official of a Russian intelligence agency when he found out that all Great Patriotic War memorials in the municipality were not only in place but were in fact well maintained.

34 "Sotrudniki Rosgardii [sic] v Khersonskoi oblasti privodiat v poriadok memorialy, posvishchennye podvigu sovetskikh soldat v gody VOV," *Pervyi kanal*, April 16, 2022, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2022-04-16/426620-sotrudniki_rosgardii_v_hersons; "V preddverii Dnia Pobedy rosgvardeitsy oblagorazhivaiut memorialy sovetskim voenam v Khersonskoi oblasti," *Dzen*, April 12, 2022, <https://dzen.ru/media/uralgvard/v-preddverii-dnia-pobedy-rosgvardeicy-oblagorajivaiut-memorialy-sovetskim-voenam-v-hersonskoi-oblasti-6255519b142a7e6829719cd9>. For a similar statement about Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region, see Mamsurov, "Put' k miru." (1:50 in the embedded video).

35 Observations by local resident Anna Moloshnikova.

sion for schoolchildren led by the searcher interviewed four years earlier in the Ukrainian news report; yet later in the same video, one interviewee claims that “for the past eight years they tried to rewrite our history, they tried to change our history. The feats of our ancestors were forgotten.”³⁶ In another episode, the Russian journalist points to a discolored list of names as proof that “for a long time, nobody has taken care of the memorials.”³⁷

Sometimes, however, all that is needed to debunk a Russian claim is to study the very materials provided as evidence of new Russian care after years of Ukrainian neglect. Thus, at a memorial in Mordvynivka near Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, a participant in a ceremony to rebury the recently discovered bones of dead Red Army soldiers was shown claiming that no such ceremonies had been possible under Ukrainian rule—against the backdrop of recent graves with Ukrainian-language inscriptions.³⁸ A similar ceremony in Milove, Luhans'k region, took place at a memorial that had been renovated at considerable cost as recently as 2021 under a nationwide program of restoring cultural heritage sites initiated by President Volodymyr Zelens'kyi.³⁹ A video of a worker polishing the base of an eternal flame in Vovchans'k, Kharkiv region, also shows that the memorial was already in excellent shape, with previously planted flowers in full bloom.⁴⁰

Complaints about real or imagined Ukrainian bans were also frequent at military commemoration events other than Victory Day. In Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, participants in a May 28 event for the Soviet-era Border Guard Day were filmed presenting a litany of grievances about being prevented by the Ukrainian authorities from displaying Soviet symbols and about the celebration having been moved to a different date by the Ukrainian state.⁴¹ At a June 22 ceremony in the same city, an old man holding a red banner⁴² was recorded claiming that during an unspecified

36 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6665, May 4, 2022, 2:14.

37 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6662, May 4, 2022, 0:40.

38 <https://t.me/NewsKhersonLife/1240>, May 7, 2022; https://t.me/vezhlivo_ru/8682, May 8, 2022; “Rabotniki melovskoi prokuratury pochtily pamiat' pogibshikh v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, March 17, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/rabotniki-melovskoj-prokuratury-pochtili-pamyat-pogibshih-v-gody-velikoj-ottechestvennoj-vojny>.

39 “U merezhi pokazaly.”

40 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6686, May 5, 2022. We thank Petra Hudek for helping us to identify the location, which is not named in the video.

41 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7821, May 28, 2022; Mamsurov, “Put' k miru” 6:10.

42 The red flag displaying a yellow five-pointed star in the middle is sometimes called the “flag of the Red Army” in Western publications but was in fact a simplified generic version of army unit banners, especially those of the so-called guard units created in 1941.

event under Ukrainian rule his flag was trampled upon, he was looked upon with hatred, and a friend was brutally detained. His words were then further radicalized in a newspaper article that misquoted him as saying that “Nazis” had trampled his “Victory banner.”⁴³ Also in Melitopol’, Russian officials opening a monument to a Soviet KGB colonel who died in Afghanistan proclaimed that “the Ukrainian Nazi authorities tried to erase from our memory everything connected to our heroes,”⁴⁴ implying that veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war were not memorialized in Ukraine despite the countless prominent memorials to them built in the post-Soviet period. In Rozivka, in the same region, a participant in a commemorative ceremony for the 799th anniversary of the Battle of the Kalka River claimed that no such ceremonies had been possible there “for eight years” (since the “coup”).⁴⁵ Yet a reenactment festival to celebrate the battle had been taking place both before and after 2014, already anachronistically referencing “Cossacks” as participants in the medieval battle just as the Russian-sponsored ceremony of 2022 would.⁴⁶

Like Victory Day celebrations and associated rituals across post-Soviet space, the care of monuments was typically presented as an effort to follow the precepts of the generation that fought in the Great Patriotic War, as well as an effort to pass on their tradition to one’s own children. The activist featured in the Beryslav video claimed that he was “doing all of this for the children. For my son, for the rising generation that will pick up the wreath of the common fate of our great people going forward.”⁴⁷

Yet the supposedly traditional Soviet symbols and rituals that the occupiers and their collaborators claimed Ukraine had banned are in fact the result of a post-Soviet syncretism that draws on Soviet, Russian nationalist or imperial, and religious sources. While similar syncretization pro-

See Russian Centre of Vexillology and Heraldry, “Armeiskie znamena i flagi VVS SSSR,” June 22, 2019, <http://www.vexillographia.ru/russia/USSRarmy.htm>.

43 “Pamiat’ pavshikh khranim,” *Tavricheskie vesti*, June 20–29, 2022.

44 “V Melitopole odkryli pamiatnik rukovoditeliu shturma dvortsa Amina Georgiiu Boiarinovu,” TASS, November 19, 2022, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/16375391>.

45 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834, May 29, 2022, 2:33.

46 “V zaporozhskikh stepiakh kazaki iz byvshikh stran SSSR srazhalis’ za chest’ Il’i Muromtsa, Dobryni Nikiticha i Aleshy [sic] Popovicha,” *Vgorode*, May 30, 2011, <https://zp.vgorode.ua/news/sobytyia/57680>; Anna Dorokhova, Anna Trubitsyna, and Aleksei Pavliuk, “Fol’klorny festival’ na Kamennykh mogilakh,” *Mariupol’skoe televidenie*, June 6, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160814030020/http://www.mariupolskoe.tv/news/news-story/fol-klorny-j-festival-na-kamenny-h-mogilah/>.

47 https://t.me/shot_shot/39151, May 4, 2022.

cesses have been at work in post-Soviet Ukraine, the occupiers never displayed any awareness of the tension between Orthodox Christian and Bolshevik symbols, or between those associated with the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia. Thus, in the run-up to May 9, the head of the self-declared Luhans'k People's Republic, Leonid Pasichnyk, and the secretary of the General Council of the United Russia party, Andrei Turchak, made the sign of the cross in front of the red star-shaped base of an eternal flame in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region.⁴⁸ At a Victory Day ceremony in Tokmak, Zaporizhzhia region, an Orthodox priest exhorted those assembled to “honor the memory of your kin [*rod*], lest your kin die out from the earth.... One must not trample on monuments to fallen warriors, one must not defile churches and monuments as is being done now. You are the children and grandchildren of those who died for faith and fatherland.” He then went on to call the St. George's Ribbon (see chapter 7) a Christian symbol that is being banned by the Ukrainians and to sing the 1975 Soviet song *Den' Pobedy* (Victory Day).⁴⁹ In Skadovs'k, Kherson region, an old man (known locally as a currency speculator⁵⁰) interviewed for a propaganda video mentions that he would have loved to place flowers at the feet of the (removed) Lenin statue and thanks the Russian soldiers for their “divine help.”⁵¹ In November 2022, the new Kherson-based propaganda TV channel *Tavriia* showed a feature about the reburial of WWII-era soldiers' remains in Kakhovka, Kherson region. Footage of a casket draped in a Soviet flag with a large hammer-and-symbol sickle being lowered into a grave was accompanied with the words “The reburial took place in strict observance of Christian custom.”⁵²

Indeed, the process of mixing commemorative symbols into new combinations has continued during the Russian invasion. Thus, the above-

48 “Glava LNR i sekretar' gensoвета partii ‘ER’ vozlozhili tsvety k Vechnomu ogniu v Starobel'ske,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 3, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/glava-lnr-i-sekretar-gensoвета-partii-er-vozlozhili-cvety-k-vechnomu-ogniu-v-starobel-ske>.

49 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zjHhhPXrMA>, May 9, 2022 (video no longer available as of March 2023).

50 See “Fraza ‘Skadovs'k—tse Ukraïna’ iak pryvid dlia vykradennia: druzhynu zamorduvaly, cholovika pobylly,” *Mediina initsiatyva za prava liudyny*, October 19, 2022, <https://mipl.org.ua/fraza-skadovsk-cze-ukrayina-yak-pryvid-dlya-vykradennya-druzhynu-zamorduvaly-cholovika-pobylly/> and several posts about him in the Facebook group “Skadovsk” at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2564007797159267/>.

51 https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022.

52 “Na Allee slavy v Kakhovke proveli zakhoronenie voïnov-osvoboditelei vremen VOV,” *Lenta novostei Khersona*, November 7, 2022, <https://kherson-news.ru/society/2022/11/07/62915.html>, 2:05.



Figure 4.1. Reburying the remains of soldiers who died during the Second World War, Memorial of Glory in the village of Mordvynivka, Zaporizhzhia region. The ritual involved an honor guard by the Russian military police with a Soviet flag, a priest asperging the coffins with holy water, a gunfire salute, reenactors, and people standing inside the grave lowering the coffins. A similar ritual took place in the Luhans'k region. Image source: Telegram channel *luzhnyi platsdarm*, https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6783, May 7, 2022.

mentioned reburial ceremony in Mordvynivka, Zaporizhzhia region, involved child-size coffins adorned with pentagrams made of St. George's Ribbons (see figure 4.1).⁵³

REKINDLING THE ETERNAL FLAME

However, the central element of renovation efforts and the focal point of many ceremonies for Victory Day and other commemorative dates has been the eternal flame. Eternal flames started appearing in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s and became habitual elements of war memorials in the 1960s, following an initial repudiation of this commemorative symbol as bourgeois and un-Bolshevik.⁵⁴

⁵³ <https://t.me/NewsKhersonLife/1240>, May 7, 2022, at 1:46.

⁵⁴ Anna Iudkina, "Ogon' voiny i ogon' mira': pervye 'vechnye ogni' v SSSR," in *Mifologicheskie modeli i ritual'noe povedenie v sovetskom i postsovetskom prostranstve*, ed. Aleksandra Arkhipova (Moscow: RGGU, 2013), 249–57; Anna Iudkina, "Pamiatnik bez pamiati': pervyi vech-



Figure 4.2. On May 2, 2014, 42 people died in a fire in the House of Trade Unions in Odesa during a pro-Russian demonstration. The image shows a candle lit to commemorate them at a memorial in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, to Teachers Who Died Fighting for the Motherland (in the Great Patriotic War). The memorial's base includes artillery shells filled with "sacred soil from the hero cities: Kyiv, Odesa, Brest, Volgograd, Minsk, Moscow, Leningrad, Sevastopol', Kerch', and Novorossiisk." During the commemorative ceremony, memorial lights were placed at the foot of the monument to spell the word "Odesa." Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *luzhnyi platsdarm* on May 3, 2022, https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6589.

In 2022, the sacral character of eternal flames lit at war memorials was underlined by placing them in a religious context. In offline and online pro-occupation media, the flame as a symbol gained traction on the eve of the highest Orthodox Christian holiday, Easter, which fell on April 24 of that year. On Easter Sunday and the following days, flames lit from the Holy Fire at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem were brought to several occupied cities. For example, they reached Melitopol' and Enerhodar, both in the Zaporizhzhia region, on April 25 and 26, respectively. On April 27, a flame was brought to Kherson, as proxy governor Volodymyr Sal'do claimed, "already through Crimea."⁵⁵ Another wave of discussion of the flame symbol occurred a week later, on and around May 2, when occupation newspapers and social media referred to flames from the Trade Union House in Odesa: on that date in 2014, 42 participants of a pro-Russian demonstration died in a fire in the building.⁵⁶ In 2022, memorial candles were lit at many Great Patriotic War memorials, often as part of large-

nyi ogon' v SSSR," in *Pamiatnik i prazdnik: Etnografiia Dnia Pobedy*, ed. Mikhail Gabovich [Mischa Gabowitsch] (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020), 124–51.

⁵⁵ https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1404, April 28, 2022.

⁵⁶ For a detailed bipartisan investigation of the events of May 2, 2014, see the website of the "May 2 Group," <https://2maygroup.blogspot.com>.

scale commemorative events. Around May 9—Victory Day—flames became ubiquitous. In at least one case (in Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia region), an eternal flame at a war memorial was lit from a wax candle brought from the local Orthodox church.⁵⁷ Linking Easter, the Odesa fire, and the Great Patriotic War sanctified and desecularized the Eternal Flame as a symbol of war commemoration. In addition, this use of flames served to inscribe the victims of Ukrainian “Nazism” into the continuity of Second World War-era victims of German Nazism, in keeping with the official Russian interpretation of events in Odesa.

More generally, (re-)kindling eternal flames has been one of the main ways in which the occupiers have staged the restoration of Great Patriotic War memory following its supposed neglect in independent or post-Euromaidan Ukraine. The claim in many cases was that an eternal flame installed at a local memorial had not been lit since 2014 or 2015, that it had been cut off from the gas supply altogether,⁵⁸ “put out,”⁵⁹ or even “destroyed by the previous administration,”⁶⁰ though sometimes they simply stated that it “went out” at a given point in the past.⁶¹

In other cases, Russians claimed that whereas the eternal flame had only been lit occasionally for special commemorative dates under Ukrainian rule, it would now burn “for eternity.”⁶² Vitalii Kishkinov, a member of the People’s Council of the self-proclaimed LNR, said at a ceremony in Severodonets’k, Luhans’k region in August 2022 that he never would have thought he would have to light an eternal flame since it must burn

57 https://t.me/v_and_z/570, May 8, 2022.

58 For example, in Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region: <https://t.me/nkPravda/3207>, May 4, 2022; in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region: “V Melitopole zazhgli Vechnyi ogon'. Seti: ‘Teper’ budet goret’ vechno!,” IA Regnum, March 31, 2022, <https://regnum.ru/article/3550549.html>; in Volnovakha and Urzuf, Donetsk region: “V osvobodzhennykh Volnovakhe i Urzufe vperve za vosem' let zazhgli Vechnyi ogon',” *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 9, 2022, <https://dan-news.ru/obschestvo/v-osvobodzhennykh-volnovahe-i-urzufe-vperve-za-vosem-let-zazhgli-vechnyj-ogon/>; “Obshchestvenniki proverili sostoianie memorialov s Vechnym ognem v trekh osvobodzhennykh punktakh,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 20, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/obshestvenniki-proverili-sostoyanie-memorialov-s-vechnym-ognem-v-treh-osvobodzhennykh-punktakh>.

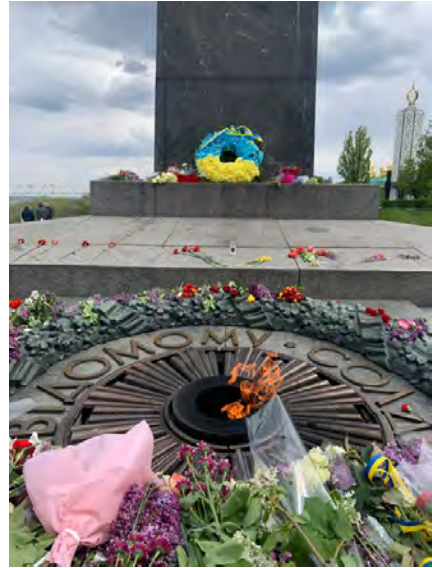
59 Egortsev, *Den' Pobedy na Dnepre*, 7:45.

60 Energodar (rezerv), “Energodar. Pamiatniki obretaiut svoi istoricheskii [sic] vid!” YouTube video, 1:02, April 29, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORoZKR8iCm8>.

61 “Rabotniki prokuratury v Novopskove zazhgli Vechnyi ogon' u memoriala pavshim voenam,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 14, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/rabotniki-prokuratury-v-novopskove-zazhgli-vechnyj-ogon-u-memoriala-pavshim-voinam>.

62 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6722, May 6, 2022, 0:45; “V Melitopole zazhgli Vechnyi ogon'.”

Figure 4.3. Eternal Glory monument at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Kyiv. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, May 2023.



all the time.⁶³ Such statements are misleading on several counts. Lighting eternal flames only for special occasions is quite common across Russia as well as in places controlled by the self-proclaimed people's republics since 2014.⁶⁴ In addition, there are several permanently lit eternal flames in Ukraine (see figure 4.3).⁶⁵

In some cases, the occupiers proudly reported the installation of new eternal flames where none had existed.⁶⁶ In at least one case, a flame was renovated in time for Victory Day, even though this meant dismantling part of the memorial that contained it.⁶⁷

In many Russian propaganda videos, eternal flames were lit by (often camouflaged) Russian soldiers, thus staging a military-supported “return to normal.” In addition, however, Russian proxy officials often made an appearance at such lighting ceremonies, hoping to draw legitimacy from the performance.⁶⁸ A number of organizations and prominent individ-

⁶³ <https://t.me/Letnab22/1284>, August 30, 2022.

⁶⁴ For example, in Alchevs'k, Luhans'k region: “Zazhzhenie Vechного ognia u memoriala sovetskim voynam sostoyalos' v Alchevske,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 19, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/zazhzhenie-vechnogo-ognia-u-memoriala-sovetskim-voynam-sostoyalos-v-alchevske>. On eternal flames in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, see Iudkina, “Pamiatnik bez pamiati.”

⁶⁵ See, for example, on war memorials in Kyiv, Odesa, Mykolaïv, and Poltava as well as at a decommunized memorial to the October Revolution in central Kharkiv.

⁶⁶ See, for example, in Volnovakha, Donetsk'k region: “V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik Voynam-osvoboditeliam i memorial 'Zhertvam fashizma,’” *Donetskoe agentstvo novosti*, May 15, 2022, <https://dan-news.ru/culture/v-volnovahe-vosstanovili-pamiatnik-voynam-osvoboditeljam-i-memorial-zhertvam/?lang=ru>.

⁶⁷ Photographic evidence provided by Alla Krymchenkova, Kakhovka.

⁶⁸ For examples from the Donetsk'k and Luhans'k regions, see “Glava DNR zazheg vechnyi ogon' v osvobozhdennom Mariupole,” *Donetskoe agentstvo novosti*, May 9, 2022, <https://dan-news.ru/obschestvo/glava-dnr-zazheg-vechnyj-ogon-v-osvobozhdennom-mariupole/?lang=ru>; “Spiker parlamenta DNR prinial uchastie v zazhzhennii Vechного ognia v osvobozhdennom Mangushe,” *Donetskoe agentstvo novosti*, May 9, 2022, <https://dan-news.ru/obschestvo/spiker-parlamenta-dnr-prinial-uchastie-v-zazhzhennii-vechnogo-ognia-v-osvobozhdennom-mangushe/?lang=ru>.

uals specialized in attending to eternal flames throughout the occupied territories. The Russian rock singer Iuliia Chicherina toured the region, lighting eternal flames at Great Patriotic War memorials for the cameras.⁶⁹ Government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) such as *Peace to the Luhans'k Region* carried out much-publicized “monitorings” of the state of eternal flames in the “liberated” territories.⁷⁰

Along with rituals that brought local commemorative calendars in sync with Russian ones, ceremonies involving the eternal flame were among the main practices symbolically linking the occupied territories with the Russian homeland, with the fire used to light the flames brought from important sites in Russia.⁷¹ The importance of the eternal flame in symbolizing the restoration of “proper” war memory also created the paradoxical practice of installing “temporary eternal flames” or using portable flames, or even oil lamps, in places without a permanent gas supply.⁷² Incidentally, oil lamps had already been in use in Ukraine as commemorative symbols before 2022.

In addition, eternal flames were also used to highlight the industrial heritage that is so important to Russian views of the Donbas and more generally of the Soviet past. In his above-mentioned speech in Severodonets'k, Kishkinov stressed the fact that the eternal flame was “the first object starting to live and breathe” on the day Russia reconnected the city to its gas supply—echoing the connection between war memory and the achievements of the Soviet gas industry that has been drawn regularly since the first known eternal flame was installed by the director of a gas

dan-news.ru/obschestvo/spiker-parlamenta-dnr-prinjal-uchastie-v-zazhzhennii-vechnogo-ognja-v-osvobozhdenom/?lang=ru; “V osvobozhdennykh Volnovakhe i Urzufe.” In Kherson, on April 12, 2022, members of the proxy Committee for the Salvation of Kherson simply rekindled the eternal flame in the Park of Glory and removed the Ukrainian flag from the adjacent flagpole (Mykola Homanyuk's field observations).

69 See, for example, <https://t.me/zaborzp/15982>, April 22, 2022.

70 “Mir Luganshchine” provedet aktsiiu ‘Ogon’ Pobedy,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 16, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/mir-luganshchine-provedet-aktsiyu-ogon-pobedy>; “Obshchestvenniki proverili”; “Sostoianie voinskiikh memorialov s Vechnym ognem proverili aktivisty OD ‘Mir Luganshchine’ na osvobozhdennykh territoriiakh LNR,” *Mir Luganshchine* (blog), April 30, 2022, <https://mir-lug.info/novosti-proektov-sostoyanie-voinskiikh-memorialov-s-vechnym-ognyom-proverili-aktivisty-od-mir-luganshchine-na-osvobozhdyonnyh-territoriyah-lnr/>.

71 “Volonteriy ONF zazhgli ogon’ pamiati na vosstanovlennoi bratskoi mogile v Schast’e,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 8, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/volonteriy-onf-zazhgli-ogon-pamati-na-vosstanovlennoj-bratskoj-mogile-v-scast-e>.

72 For temporary eternal flames, see “V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik.” For oil lamps, see “Volonteriy ONF zazhgli ogon’ pamiati na vosstanovlennoi bratskoi mogile v Schast’e.”

plant in the Tula region in the mid-1950s.⁷³ In 2022, the Russian-appointed administrations sometimes rekindled eternal flames without connection to any particular commemorative date, simply to mark that the gas supply had been restored to their city.⁷⁴

SPURIOUS RECONSTRUCTION

One of the main tropes of Russian war propaganda concerns Ukraine's supposed neglect of Soviet memorials to the Great Patriotic War. Accordingly, the Russian forces undertook many widely publicized acts of reconstruction or beautification, especially in the run-up to Victory Day. Since most such memorials were actually well maintained, they had to invent creative ways of showcasing improvements.

In some cases, the damage remedied by Russian restoration measures was due to the Russian invasion itself. One example is the T-34 tank monument in Volnovakha, Donetsk region.⁷⁵ Another is a supposed "monument to heroes of the Great Patriotic War" that had been left to decay "for eight years," according to a propaganda video that also showed one of the statues from the memorial lying on the ground and designated for re-erection. In fact, the statue had been damaged during the Russian shelling of Mariupol'. Not to mention the fact that the monument, built in 1968, was devoted to the Communist Youth Union (Komsomol) rather than the Great Patriotic War, and while there was a soldier from that war among the three figures symbolizing different periods of Komsomol activity, that statue remained standing.⁷⁶ In one case, in Volnovakha district, Donetsk region, a video shows debris being cleared away to make the writing on a monument visible. The debris in question clearly resulted from a botched earlier maintenance attempt.⁷⁷ In other cases, removing anti-occupation graffiti was presented as monument maintenance.⁷⁸

⁷³ Iudkina, "Pamiatnik bez pamiati."

⁷⁴ For an example in Berdiansk, Zaporizhzhia region, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/12357, October 31, 2022.

⁷⁵ "V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik."

⁷⁶ <https://t.me/zvezdanews/78654>, May 3, 2022.

⁷⁷ Igor' Kokhanyi (@kokhanyigor), "Na osvobodzhennykh territoriiakh ko Dniu Pobedy," Twitter, May 4, 2022, 8:36am, <https://twitter.com/kokhanyigor/status/1521740630753480704>.

⁷⁸ As in a video of the tank monument in Kherson's Park of Glory from April 2022: https://t.me/herson_today/319, April 27, 2022.

Where monuments were in good condition, maintenance was sometimes simply staged for the cameras. Thus, one Russian propaganda video about monument reconstruction in the “liberated” territories shows people engaged in the maintenance of a war memorial in Skadovs’k, Kherson region.⁷⁹ Eye-witnesses report that the territory of the memorial was cordoned off by Russian soldiers for 30 minutes, during which a staged maintenance act was performed for Russian TV.⁸⁰ In Kherson, an article in a Russian propaganda newspaper reported on a group of young men “brushing up” a monument to the Soviet 295th Rifle Division. The monument had been in excellent condition; following a widespread Soviet and post-Soviet tradition, it had been placed under the patronage of a local school, as documented in a plaque installed on it.⁸¹

While the existence of such patronage practices in independent Ukraine was never mentioned in Russian propaganda, pro-occupation reporting made a point of underscoring the voluntary nature of monument maintenance efforts under Russian rule. Thus, in the Luhans’k region, a GONGO titled *Sisters of Victory* was supposedly created by local students and composed of the “wives and girlfriends of service members participating in the special operation.” The group became infamous for a militaristic cover of the *Wellerman* shanty released online in April and swiftly parodied,⁸² but its brand was also used in reports about monument maintenance in the occupied territories along with other groups intended to confer local legitimacy, such as a “tourism and local history circle” in Starobil’s’k, Luhans’k region.⁸³

Apart from eternal flames (see previous section) and Victory Banners (discussed in chapter 7), the main symbol of the restoration of Great Patriotic War memory has been paint.

“Paint wars” surrounding monuments have a long-standing tradition in the post-socialist countries. The Pink Tank in Prague and the Soviet war memorial in central Sofia are internationally known examples of monu-

79 https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022, at 2:16

80 Personal communication from two Skadovs’k residents.

81 “Dan’ pamiati.”

82 For the original song and quote, see https://vk.com/wall-50332460_2917473, April 20, 2022; parody: Razgovornyi zhanr, “Pikuli–Parodiia na pesniu soldatskikh zhen,” YouTube video, 2:31, September 20, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okQUFFwMXgo>.

83 “‘Sestry Pobedy’ i turisty-kraevedy proveli subbotnik u pamiatnika na Starobel’shchine,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 7, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/sestry-pobedy-i-turisty-kraevedy-proveli-subbotnik-u-pamyatnika-na-starobel-shine>.

ments to Soviet soldiers that have repeatedly been painted and scrubbed clean to send various political messages. In Ukraine, such conflicts have typically involved the colors of the Ukrainian and Russian flags. Thus, in 2015, the city authorities of Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region, had a Great Patriotic War memorial in the city center repainted blue and yellow before Victory Day instead of the yellow and black colors of a Tsarist and Soviet era military distinction.⁸⁴ Conversely, in Kakhovka, Kherson region, in July 2018, someone painted the Russian tricolor on the pedestal of a monument to “victims of fascism.”⁸⁵

Following the Russian invasion, the occupiers “restored” the Enerhodar memorial by repainting it, though they chose the black-and-orange colors of the post-Soviet St. George’s Ribbon instead of the previous black and yellow.⁸⁶ The stele of another Great Patriotic War memorial, located in a wooded part of Enerhodar, was also painted in the same colors, even though it had been monochrome before.⁸⁷

One particularly intriguing aspect of the use of paint in spurious reconstruction concerns the occupiers’ interaction with the polychromy of rural war memorials discussed in chapter 2. In our overview of *blahoustrii* practices in that chapter, we mentioned how applying monochrome paint is a long-standing tradition that protects such monuments from the effects of weather and is usually done in preparation for Victory Day or some other commemorative celebrations. This practice of renewing paint was continued under the occupation.

In at least one case, this involved reverting from polychromy back to monochromy. In Volnovakha, Donetsk region, a memorial to “victims of fascism” showing the figures of a soldier and emaciated civilian had been turned polychrome in recent years, with a photograph from 2018 showing these figures painted green, with the soldier’s rifle black and his medals and belt buckle gold.⁸⁸ For Victory Day 2022, the occupiers had the entire

84 “Na obnovlennii memorial v Energodare burno otreagirovali v sotssetiakh,” *Zaporozh’e: Gorodskoi portal*, April 28, 2015, https://misto.zp.ua/article/partners/na-obnovlennyy-memorial-v-energodare-burno-otreagirovali-v-socsetyakh_18534.html.

85 “Na iuge Ukrainy neizvestnye razrisovali pamiatnik v rossiiskii trikolor,” *Versiiia*, July 15, 2018, <https://versiya.info/v-mire/76310>.

86 “Energodar. Pamiatniki obretaiut svoi istoricheskii [sic] vid!!!”; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6353, April 28, 2022.

87 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6353, April 28, 2022.

88 “Bratskaia mogila sovetских voinov v Letnem parke g. Volnovakhi,” *Shukach*, July 31, 2018, <https://www.shukach.com/ru/node/64032>.



Figure 4.4. Victory Day concert at the memorial to Victims of Fascism in Volnovakha, Donetsk region. The monument has been turned monochrome again (compare figure 2.9). Image source: *Donets'koe agentstvo novosti*, May 15, 2022, <https://dan-news.ru/culture/v-volnovahe-vosstanovili-pamjatnik-voinam-osvoboditeljam-i-memorial-zhertvam>.

monument, including its concrete base and back wall, painted a monotonous gray to serve as backdrop for a concert by four girls in Red Army-style sidecaps and skirts (figure 4.4).⁸⁹

Often, however, the occupation, under the guise of renovating memorials after a supposed period of neglect, amplified the practice of polychromy or let it run wild rather than suppressing it. Monuments continued to be given new coats of paint regardless of their materials or the sculptors' original intentions, often using different colors to highlight different elements of a statue or monument, for example, by painting the boots of a soldier statue black or the colors on bas-relief soldiers' helmets red.⁹⁰ In Heniches'k, Kherson region, a concrete soldier statue repainted in a comic-book gray-and-olive color scheme was presented as evidence of "specialist" restoration and that "concerned citizens are so carefully looking after objects of cultural heritage."⁹¹ Official patronage for this resto-

⁸⁹ "V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik."

⁹⁰ Both examples are in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region. See https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/9046, July 1, 2022; "V Melitopole vosstanovili memorial sovetskim voenam," *RIA Novosti Krym*, July 23, 2022, <https://crimea.ria.ru/20220723/v-melitopole-vosstanovili-memorial-sovetskim-voenam-video-1123940725.html>. For several more examples from different parts of the occupied territories, see https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022, for example, at 3:30 and 4:10.

⁹¹ https://t.me/tavria_kherson/2446, October 30, 2022; "V Genicheske vosstanovili pamiatnik soldatam Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny," *ZOV Kherson*, October 31, 2022, <https://kherson-news.ru/other/2022/10/31/59893.html>.



Figure 4.5. Painting letters on the pedestal of a monument to General Marhelov in Kherson. In the occupied territories, gold paint was widely used to paint both metal and engraved letters on the bases of monuments. Non-painted letters were demonstrated as evidence that monuments in independent Ukraine were not taken care of. Screenshot from a video posted by the Telegram channel *luzhnyi platsdarm*, June 26, 2022, t.me/yug-plazdarm/8759.

ration was provided by a number of Russian political organizations, even though Russians had earlier been scandalized by such practices when they encountered them, for example, in occupied Crimea.⁹²

Another popular mode of “renovation” has been to paint letters gold (see figure 4.5).⁹³ One memorial in the village of Zaporiz’ke, Luhans’k region, was repainted using a gray, white, red, and turquoise color scheme.⁹⁴ In Starobil’s’k, Luhans’k region, a soldier statue that is part of a monument to a local regiment was painted to look like a wax figure wearing a gray trench coat.⁹⁵ In Pershozvanivka, Luhans’k region, beautification involved

⁹² “V Krymu porozoveli voennye pamiatniki,” *Lenta novostei Kryma*, August 6, 2015, <https://crimea-news.com/society/2015/06/08/95533.html>.

⁹³ As in the case of the main Great Patriotic War memorial in Starobil’s’k, Luhans’k region (“Vozvrashchenie domoi”) or a monument in Kherson to the 295th Rifle Division (Mykola Homanyuk’s observations and photos and “Dan’ pamiati.”).

⁹⁴ “Deputaty Narodnogo Soveta LNR i zhiteli Starobel’shchiny blagoustroili memorial s Vechnym ognem,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 29, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/deputaty-narodnogo-soveta-lnr-i-zhiteli-starobel-shiny-blagoustroili-memorial-s-vechnym-ognem>.

⁹⁵ For a photo, see <https://storage.lug-info.com/cache/3/3/acaf05a5-b382-4455-86a2-1b8234ccdd47.jpg?w1000h616>, included in: “Torzhestvennoe zazhzhenie privezenno-go iz Moskvy Vechnogo ognia sostoyalos’ v Starobel’ske,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 9, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/torzhestvennoe-zazhzhenie-privezenno-go-iz-moskvy-vechnogo-ognya-sostoyalos-v-starobel-ske>.



Figure 4.6. Monument to “Internationalist warriors who fell in Afghanistan and other global hot spots,” Kherson. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2022.

painting large red carnations with green stems on a Great Patriotic War memorial.⁹⁶ The star-shaped base of an eternal flame in Lazurne, Kherson region, was repainted red.⁹⁷

Even bronze statues, intended to develop a patina, have not been exempt from such painting. In Kherson’s Park of Glory, two statues built in post-Soviet Ukraine commemorate local soldiers who died during the Soviet campaigns

in Afghanistan and elsewhere: a bronze statue from 1999 shows a kneeling mother holding an icon, while a bronze-like polymer statue from 2013 depicts a sitting soldier. In July and August 2022, the Russian-led youth organization “Young Builders of Kherson” painted both monuments in multiple colors, for example, using gold paint for the icon (see figure 4.6).⁹⁸ (In other cases, bronze or brass monuments were sanded or rasped rather than painted to produce similar effects, as in the case of a high-relief brass portrait of Kherson partisan Omelian Hirs’kyi. Installed on a wall in a street named after him, in September 2022, the portrait was filed to make the face and hair appear in different colors.⁹⁹)

These repainting performances are typically presented as community get-togethers in the style of the Soviet-era *subbotniks*—formally voluntary days of unpaid work, often to clean streets or monuments.¹⁰⁰ Rather than

96 “Lutuginskie aktivisty priveli v poriadok bratskuiu mogilu i stelu v sele Pervozvanovka,” *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 28, 2022, <https://lug-info.com/news/lutuginskie-aktivisty-priveli-v-poryadok-bratskuyu-mogilu-i-stelu-v-sele-pervozvanovka>.

97 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1674, May 5, 2022.

98 “Volontery obshchestvennoi organizatsii ‘Molodye stroiteli Khersona’ obnovili pamiatnik voiam-internatsionalistam v Parke Slavy,” *Lenta novosti Khersona*, July 28, 2022, <https://kherson-news.ru/society/2022/07/28/16837.html>; https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3139, September 3, 2022.

99 Observations and photo by Mykola Homanyuk.

100 For examples, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8617, June 21, 2022; “Deputaty Narodnogo Soveta LNR”; “Sestry Pobedy” i turisty-kraevedy.” On the history of *subbotniks* from the times of the Russian Civil War through revivals in the late USSR and post-Soviet coun-

constituting preservation, their primary purpose appears to be to create evidence of respectful interaction with a monument, in the absence of more meaningful forms of such interaction. Videos and photos broadcast on Russian propaganda channels often feature paint buckets, paintbrushes, paint scrapers, cement bags, saws, scaffolding, and other maintenance paraphernalia.¹⁰¹ The accompanying messages sometimes proudly proclaim that these supplies were provided to local volunteers by the Russian National Guard.¹⁰²

When monuments are repainted in this way, this is often accompanied by the claim that the Ukrainians did it wrong. Thus, in the case of the tank monument in Volnovakha, one occupation news agency trumpeted the fact that a sign of distinction was painted on the tank—even though pre-occupation photos clearly show that that symbol had been there under Ukrainian rule as well, and moreover, the article mixed up the name of the sign.¹⁰³ The town's Russian-installed mayor also declared that “under Ukrainian occupation, the monument was maintained in a purely formalistic way; it was painted in a single color.”¹⁰⁴ The Russian side chose particularly vivid colors instead. In any case, if any of the occupiers had been scandalized by polychromy, whatever countermeasures they put in place were forgotten as their attention shifted away from memorials. Simply letting locals do what they had always done while presenting it as a Russian-enabled practice was a cheap way of boasting about monument maintenance while limiting the resources spent on it.

tries, see Olga Golechkova and Olga Chagadaeva, “Subbotniks: From the Great to the Meaningless (the Evolution of the Soviet Labor Phenomenon),” *Labor History* 62, no. 2 (2021): 148–65; M.O. Piskunov and T.N. Rakov, “Pozdnesovetskie subbotniki: ot produktivistskoi utopii k ritualam politicheskoi loial'nosti,” *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta: Istorii*, no. 73 (2021): 31–40; M.O. Piskunov and T.N. Rakov, “Kommunisticheskii trud? Subbotnik mezhdru pozdnesovetskim ritualom i ekologicheskoi praktikoi,” *Vestnik Surgutskogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta* 6 (2021): 113–20; Francisco Martínez, *Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia: An Anthropology of Forgetting, Repair and Urban Traces* (London: UCL Press, 2018), 227–29.

¹⁰¹ For examples, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6402, April 29, 2022; “Energodar. Pamiatniki obretaiut svoi istoricheskii [sic] vid!,” 0:50; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6322, April 27, 2022; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/9295, July 9, 2022; Kokhanyi, “Na osvobozhennykh territoriiakh.”

¹⁰² https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6256, April 26, 2022.

¹⁰³ For a news report on this subject, see “V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik.” For photos, see “Pamiatnik iz Volnovakhi,” June 20, 2022, <https://tankist-31.livejournal.com/400961.html>. The article mentions the Order of the Red Banner, even though the symbol in question was the Sign of the Soviet Guards.

¹⁰⁴ “V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik.”

Yet while turning once-monochrome war memorials multi-colored is a continuation of recent Ukrainian practice, presenting this vernacular custom as a return to normal and trumpeting it in propaganda videos paradoxically gives it a stamp of official (Russian) approval, in keeping with the age-old Soviet and Russian tradition of integrating locally developed practices into the state's commemorative repertoire.¹⁰⁵

MONUMENTS AS SITES OF REEDUCATION

The occupiers were not content with demonstrating how the Russian troops took care of Soviet war memorials and unleashed the energies of volunteers who had been yearning to maintain monuments but feared Ukrainian reprisals. They also presented memorial modification and maintenance as a form of punishment or as a reeducation measure allowing former nationalists to redeem themselves.

Forcing locals to alter a symbolic landscape after a political takeover is a form of humiliation with a long pedigree. After the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, the Nazis forced Jews (and, occasionally, political opponents) to wash off anti-annexation slogans from city streets in what became known as “scrubbing parties,” radicalizing earlier measures by the Dollfuß and Schuschnigg governments who had forced local Nazis to wash off pro-German National Socialist slogans.¹⁰⁶

In the Soviet tradition, however, such measures were typically presented as forms of reeducation rather than mere punishment. Thus, the idea of caring for soldiers' graves and memorials as a way of educating both children and adults in the correct ideology developed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. After 1945, the Soviet civilian and military authorities in territories formerly occupied by the Germans not only organized patriotic education events around war memorials for pupils. They also expected local residents, especially in Ukrainian and

¹⁰⁵ Mischa Gabowitsch, “Are Copycats Subversive? Strategy-31, the Russian Runs, the Immortal Regiment, and the Transformative Potential of Non-Hierarchical Movements,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 5 (2018): 308–10; Gabowitsch, “Victory Day before the Cult.”

¹⁰⁶ Michaela Scharf, “Dokumentation und Demütigung. Judenverfolgung in Amateurfilmen aus dem nationalsozialistischen Wien 1938,” *Visual History: Online-Nachschlagewerk für die historische Bildforschung*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok-2180>; G. E. R. Gedyé, *Fallen Bastions: The Central European Tragedy* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), 308.

Belarusian villages, to actively maintain the communal graves of Red Army soldiers, not least as a way of training them in the official narratives of liberation which masked the considerable complexity of actual wartime events. Administrative reports from this era preserved in the Kyiv party archive amply document locals' reluctance to participate in such activities; few of them identified with soldiers from far-flung parts of the Soviet Union, and people were more interested in rebuilding their own dwellings and scrambling to survive in the hunger years of the postwar period.¹⁰⁷ This early postwar practice of mandatory monument maintenance has largely been erased from post-Soviet commemorative culture: under Brezhnev, interest in building and maintaining war memorials spread unionwide, and the new two-day weekend led to a revival of the old *subbotnik* tradition. Monument-related practices became intergenerational affairs which no longer relied as thoroughly on state policing as they did before.

During the 2022 occupation, the Russians repeatedly staged performances of atonement through interaction with monuments. In the above-quoted video from Beryslav, Kherson region, where a local activist spoke of the “degradation of the population,” the end of the degradation was symbolized by a masked Russian soldier forcing a group of alleged Ukrainian ATO veterans with shovels to “beautify” the monument in order “to expiate your sins against our ancestors” (see figure 4.7).¹⁰⁸ A propaganda video from Kherson showed Volodymyr Mykolaenko, the city's deposed mayor, being forced to look up at the Victory Banner hoisted on a flagpole and asked to disown the twentieth-century Ukrainian nationalist leader and war criminal Roman Shukhevych.¹⁰⁹

Destroying Ukrainian monuments could likewise be portrayed as a form of penitence or punishment. On April 10, 2022, according to eyewitnesses, passersby were forcibly enlisted to remove flags and portraits from the Heavenly Hundred monument in central Kherson.¹¹⁰ In

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, this report from 1956 on the state of World War II cemeteries and communal graves in Ukraine: Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine (Ts-DAHOU), f. 1, o. 24, spr. 4254, a. 155–160. See also Robert Dale, “Remobilizing the Dead: Wartime and Postwar Soviet Burial Practices and the Construction of the Memory of the Great Patriotic War,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 22, no. 1 (2021): 41–73.

¹⁰⁸ https://t.me/shot_shot/39151, May 4, 2022.

¹⁰⁹ <https://t.me/sssternenko/5217>, May 3, 2022.

¹¹⁰ This took place on the corner of Ushakova and Perekops'ka Streets. See https://t.me/kher-non_fake/694, April 11, 2022.



Figure 4.7. Beautification of the area around the Monument to the Liberator Soldiers from the Grateful Residents of Beryslav (Kherson region). A man wearing a Russian army uniform presents the lined up men as Anti-Terrorist Operation participants and says that they “besmirched the memory of their ancestors who fought for our motherland in the years of the Great Patriotic War.” Screenshot from a video posted by the Telegram channel Shot, May 4, 2022, t.me/shot_shot/39151.

the above-mentioned case of a supposed former member of the Territorial Defense blowing up an ATO monument, the narrative of a regular local resident awakening from Ukrainian nationalist propaganda was central to the video’s message. In another case, a Russian proxy official simply showed a destroyed ATO monument, claiming that it had been demolished by repentant ATO veterans.¹¹¹

Finally, those caught tampering with Great Patriotic War symbols that had been repurposed in support of the occupation were also sometimes made to engage in rituals of public repentance. In June 2022, a man previously recorded violently tearing down a Russian-hoisted Victory Banner from a flagpole in Enerhodar (see chapter 6) was then filmed making a confession: visibly intimidated, he stated that he had simply wanted to preserve the banner as a souvenir in honor of his relatives who fought in the Great Patriotic War and was also shown hoisting a Russian flag on the same flagpole.¹¹²

¹¹¹ https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1169, April 21, 2022.

¹¹² https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8566, June 19, 2022. See also “Zhiteľ Energodara raskaiasia v sniatii Znameni Pobedy i podnial Trikolor,” *Tavricheskie vesti*, June 29, 2022.

Other modes of commemoration as reeducation were not actually employed by the Russians, but their threat still haunted Ukrainians. In August 2014, following the initial invasion, the government of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic staged a "prisoners' parade," marching captured Ukrainian soldiers with tied hands through Donetsk accompanied by insults and attacks by passersby.¹¹³ Organized in direct contravention of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949, the event was a deliberate reenactment of the "Parade of the Vanquished" in July 1944, in which over 50,000 German prisoners of war were marched through Moscow (itself an implicit restaging of smaller parades of German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war in Petrograd and Moscow in 1914–15). Rumors of plans for a similar event to be held on Victory Day in Mariupol' or Rostov-on-Don circulated in the spring of 2022, but nothing of the sort materialized.¹¹⁴

MONUMENTS BUILT

The occupation administrations also initiated the construction of a number of entirely new monuments. Some of these were intended to commemorate the invasion itself in ways echoing Soviet monuments to the liberation of territories from Nazi occupiers. A block of granite newly placed in an avenue in Berdiansk, Zaporizhzhia region, was adorned with a plaque

¹¹³ Dzherri Toms, "Parad plennykh: Kak gorod Donetsk stal chuzhim," *Radio Svoboda*, January 13, 2015, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26791829.html>.

¹¹⁴ Nastoishchee vremia (@CurrentTimeTv), "V ponedel'nik liudiam, kotorye nakhodiatsia v fil'tratsionnoi tiur'me v sele Bezymennoe, stali govorit', chto 'skoree vsego na 9 maia my pereodenem vas v voennuiu formu, otvezem v Mariupol', prodietes' tam parodom plennykh,'—rasskazyvaet sovetnik mera Mariupolia Petr Andriushchenko," Twitter, May 6, 2022, 9:32am (<https://twitter.com/CurrentTimeTv/status/1522479360594395136>); Lesia Vasylenko (@lesiavasylenko), "#Russia prepares a POW parade for 09/05. This is where they bring Ukrainian prisoners out on the streets for Russians to jeer and throw garbage at them. A true demonstration of total disregard for Geneva Conventions," Twitter, May 7, 2022, 8:16am, <https://twitter.com/lesiavasylenko/status/1522822750951333888>; Igor Sushko (@igorsushko), "URGENT: According to our sources, Kremlin is evaluating the question of forcing the participation of more than 500 Ukrainian prisoners of war in the 'Victory Parade,' (May 9th) the Ukrainians POWs would be paraded in front of the shocked public. (2022 Parade practice photos)," Twitter, May 2, 2022, 7:17am, <https://twitter.com/igorsushko/status/1520995910490247168>; "NEPRAVDA: Video parada plennykh ukrainskikh soldat v Rostove v 2022 godu," *Vox Ukraine*, May 12, 2022, <https://voxukraine.org/ru/nepravda-video-parada-plennyh-ukraynskyh-soldat-v-rostove-v-2022-godu>.

saying, “A monument to the Russian liberator soldier will be installed here.”¹¹⁵ In devastated Mariupol’, Donetsk region, politicians from Russia and the self-proclaimed DNR in early May presided over the opening of a polymer statue, with a bronze-colored finish, of an elderly lady holding a (real) Soviet flag.¹¹⁶ The motif was based on the distorted story of the real-life case of Anna Ivanova, a resident of a rural suburb of Kharkiv who greeted Ukrainian soldiers with a red flag in early April 2022. Although she had seen her action as a sign of peace, the Russian media then falsely cast it as a gesture of support for the Russian invasion and turned her into a pro-war icon.¹¹⁷

A related set of memorial markers in the newly occupied territories commemorated Russians or their supporters who died during the invasion. Those with local credentials were often singled out for particularly conspicuous and speedy commemoration. This is exemplified by Volodymyr Zhoha, a separatist battalion commander who died in action in Volnovakha, Donetsk region, in March 2022, aged 29. The Russian and proxy authorities posthumously named him a Hero of Russia and Hero of the Donetsk People’s Republic and renamed several streets and squares after him both in Russia and in the occupied territories. A bust of Zhoha was unveiled in Donetsk’s Avenue of Heroes in May and another one in October in central Volnovakha, in a square renamed after him.¹¹⁸ In November 2022, Kyrylo Stremousov, the Russian-appointed deputy governor of Kherson region, died in a car accident. A mere six

¹¹⁵ “Berdiansk: okupanty planuiut vstanovyty pam’iatnyk ‘rosiiskomu soldatu-vyzvolyteliu,’” *Radio Svoboda*, June 14, 2022, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/berdyansk-okupanti-pamyatnyk-rosiyskomu-soldatu-vyzvolyteliu/31897115.html>; Lina Korsak, “Zhitel’ Berdianska rasskazal, pochemu povесil doma portret Shoigu,” *MK*, August 24, 2022, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2022/08/24/zhitel-berdyanska-rasskazal-pochemu-povesil-doma-portret-shoigu.html>.

¹¹⁶ “V Mariupole poiavilsia pamiatnik babushke, vyshedshei k boevikam s flagom SSSR,” *RIA Novosti*, May 5, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220505/babushka-1786898211.html>.

¹¹⁷ Sofia Bettiza and Svyatoslav Khomenko, “Babushka Z: The Woman Who Became a Russian Propaganda Icon,” *BBC News*, June 15, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61757667>.

¹¹⁸ “Pamiatnik Geroiu Rossii Vladimiru Zhoge otkryli v Volnovakhe,” *RIA Novosti*, October 14, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20221014/zhoga-1824008157.html>; “V Donetskoe uvekovechili pamiat’ Geroia Rossii i DNR Vladimira Zhogi,” *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 26, 2022, <https://dan-news.ru/stories/v-donecke-uvekovechili-pamjat-geroja-rossii-i-dnr-vladimira-zhogi/?lang=ru>; “V okkupirovannoi Volnovakhe otkryt ‘pamiatnik’ odnomu iz voennykh prestupnikov.”

days later, a plaque commemorating him was installed in the village of Novoluhans'ke, Donetsk region, on the building where he went to school.¹¹⁹

Other new monuments referenced the Soviet period. Some simply focused on the Great Patriotic War; thus, on December 9, 2022, the Russian-appointed administration of Heniches'k, Kherson region, opened a mural to a locally born hero of that war.¹²⁰ However, since the landscape of Great Patriotic War commemoration was already quite saturated, the occupiers expanded their scope to include other events and figures from the Soviet era. For example, the occupation administration in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, was particularly active in memorializing Soviet-era secret service members. In July 2022, they unveiled a bust of Pavel Sudoplatov, a Soviet spy born in Melitopol' and famous, among other things, for assassinating the Ukrainian nationalist leader Ievhen Konovalets'.¹²¹ In November, they opened a monument to KGB colonel Grigorii Boiarinov, who died while storming Tajbeg Palace in Kabul in December 1979.¹²² Born in Russia, Boiarinov's connection to Ukraine was limited to having lived in a village near Melitopol' for a few years during his childhood.

Another set of monuments were devoted to older events that fit the Russian historical narrative about the quintessentially Russian identity of the Ukrainian lands. The themes for these monuments were sometimes chosen out of an obvious desire to obliterate Ukrainian memorials and what they stand for rather than reflecting any great commemorative demand. On August 3, in Freedom Square in Mariupol', Donetsk region, the invaders demolished a memorial installed in 2015 to honor Ukrainian soldiers killed in action.¹²³ Within just over one month, they replaced it with a large statue of medieval grand prince Aleksandr Nevskii, who had no connection to the area but was presented as "a symbol of Russia's help

119 "V DNR otkryli memorial'nuu dosku v chest' pogibshogo zamgubernatora Khersonshchiny Kirilla Stremousova," *Donetskoe agentstvo novosti*, November 15, 2022, <https://dan-news.ru/obshchestvo/v-dnr-otkryli-memorialnuu-dosku-v-chest-pogibshogo-zamgubernatora-hersonschiny/>.

120 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/5286, December 10, 2022.

121 "Biust legendarnomu sovetskomu razvedchiku Pavlu Sudoplatovu ustanovlen v Melitopole," *Diktant Pobedy*, July 7, 2022, <https://диктантпобеды.рф/news/1258>; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/9243, July 27, 2022.

122 "V Melitopole otkryli pamiatnik."

123 "U Mariupoli RF znosyt memorial zahyblym ukrains'kym viis'kovym," *Espresso*, August 3, 2022, <https://espresso.tv/u-mariupoli-rosiyani-znosyat-memorial-pamyati-zagiblim-ukrainskim-viyskovim>.



Figure 4.8. An equestrian statue of Aleksandr Nevskii in Mariupol', Donetsk region. Source: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/18/09/2022/632666499a7947d919c33c47>, September 18, 2022.

and protection of all Orthodox people” (see figure 4.8).¹²⁴ In Berdiansk', Zaporizhzhia region, the occupiers removed a marker commemorating ATO soldiers from a memorial and replaced it with one honoring unnamed “Heroes and victims of the First World War.”¹²⁵ That war is marginal to Russian commemorative culture,¹²⁶ and Berdiansk' was very far from the main theaters of war. Yet the monument gestured at the presence of German troops in

the city in 1918 and at the official Russian view of the Ukrainian-Soviet war of 1917–18 as a foreign occupation of Russian lands, with Ukrainians acting as anti-Russian traitors by allying with Germany, contrasting with the Ukrainian interpretation of the German presence as military aid to Ukraine's ill-fated independence struggle against the Bolsheviks. This was made even more explicit in a Russian propaganda report about a memorial to Civil War-era communist partisans in Starobil'sk, Luhans'k region, which claims that in 1917, “the Austro-Hungarian boot stepped onto Russian soil at the invitation of the Central Rada of the Ukrainian People's Republic” and insinuates a near-equivalence between the German military occupations of 1918 and 1942, suggesting that the presence of

¹²⁴ “Zamist' memorialu pamiati zahyblym ukrains'kym zakhysnykam rosiiany pochaly montuvaty u Mariupoli ‘novyi totem,’” *Zmina*, August 19, 2022, <https://zmina.info/news/zamist-memorialu-pamyati-zagyblym-ukrayinskym-zahysnykam-rosiyany-pochaly-montuvaty-u-mariupoli-novyj-totem>; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/2865>, September 12, 2022; “Beglov otkryl v Mariupole pamiatnik Aleksandru Nevskomu,” *RBK*, September 18, 2022, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/18/09/2022/632666499a7947d919c33c47>.

¹²⁵ “Novosti. V Berdianske otkryli pamiatnik voynam, pogibshim v Pervoi mirovoi voine,” *Smotrim*, August 1, 2022, <https://smotrim.ru/video/2453015>; “Okkupanty v Berdianske snesli pamiatnik ukrainskim voynam i ustanovili na ego meste novyi,” *ZaBor—Gorodskoi portal Zaporozh'ia*, August 2, 2022, <https://zabor.zp.ua/new/okkupanty-v-berdyanske-snesli-pamyatnik-ukrainskim-voynam-i-ustanovili-na-ego-meste-novyy-foto>.

¹²⁶ See Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*; Cohen, *War Monuments*.

Ukrainian statehood in the region dates only to 1918 and was always contingent on foreign support.¹²⁷

These hastily erected monuments represented an effort to Russify the occupied parts of Ukraine. In order to strengthen the symbolic connection between Russia and the new territories it claimed, some of these monuments were subsequently replicated inside the aggressor country. Thus the motif of the “flag-wielding grandma” was also taken up in polymer statues and murals across Russia.¹²⁸ The idea of commemorating the nationalist-killing spy Pavel Sudoplatov was similarly imported back into Russia and the so-called People’s Republics. Following the first bust installed in Melitopol’ in July, a replica was unveiled in Donetsk in October, and another one in December in the Russian region of Bryansk, which borders on Ukraine.¹²⁹

MONUMENTS PLANNED

The speed of Russian monument-building activity was quite impressive given the seemingly more pressing concerns of the ongoing war. Still, their ambitions to build new monuments far outstripped their capacity to actually do so. Yet promises abounded. In Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region, a group of Cossacks, soldiers, reenactors, and Orthodox priests on May 29, 2022, celebrated the 799th anniversary of the Battle of the Kalka River that pitted a coalition of several Rus’ principalities and Polovtsians against the Mongol Empire. In addition to linking that battle to later Russian and Soviet military victories, the participants presented a model of a planned new memorial to the battle.¹³⁰ In Kherson, the occupation administration

¹²⁷ “Vozvrashchenie domoi.”

¹²⁸ For example, see “Prostoial odin den’: v Belgorode pamiatnik ‘babushke s krasnym flagom’ ubrali po neobychnoi prichine,” *Apostrof*, May 4, 2022, <https://apostrophe.ua/news/world/2022-05-04/prostoyal-odin-den-v-belgorode-pamyatnik-babushke-s-krasnym-flagom-ubrali-po-neobychnoj-prichine/267952>; for other examples and another discussion of Ivanova’s story, see “Ta samaia babushka s krasnym flagom. Kak ona zhila, za chto molitsia i pochemu ne podozrevaet, kak vygliadit flag Rossii—interv’iu,” *Spektr*, May 10, 2022, <https://spektr.press/ta-samaya-babushka/>.

¹²⁹ “V Donetsk otkryli pamiatnik agentu NKVD Sudoplatovu,” *MK*, October 28, 2022, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2022/10/28/v-donecke-otkryli-pamyatnik-agentu-nkvd-sudoplatovu.html>; “Biust sovetskogo razvedchika Pavla Sudoplatova otkryt v Bryanskoi oblasti,” *ZaMedia*, December 10, 2022, <https://zapnews.ru/news/byust-sovetskogo-razvedchika-pavla-sudoplatova-otkryt-v-bryanskoy-oblasti>.

¹³⁰ https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8661, June 22, 2022.

publicly discussed plans to erect a monument to Catherine II, in whose reign the modern city of Kherson was founded, in lieu of a destroyed ATO monument which had itself replaced a Lenin statue toppled during the Leninfall.¹³¹ In addition, the occupation encouraged local residents with previously marginalized views to campaign for monument construction. In late July, an elderly lady in Kherson was collecting signatures for the restoration of a statue of Soviet secret police founder Feliks Dzierżyński (also known as Dzerzhinsky) that had been removed in February 2014.¹³²

While some of the historical figures the Russians put forward for memorialization were obvious choices, in many other cases their selection represented a considerable stretch of historical realities. To stress a supposedly continuous and illustrious Russian presence in the occupied territories, they attempted to memorialize historical figures whose connection to the regions in question was tenuous at best.

Overall, Russia's management of monuments on occupied territory and more generally its politics of history, just like its military strategy, was based on an outdated and distorted understanding of Ukrainian realities. Russian claims notwithstanding, in post-Euromaidan Ukraine, and especially in the areas that Russia brought under its control, Red Army veterans continued to be honored,¹³³ and commemorative ceremonies for the Great Patriotic War regularly took place at Soviet war memorials, which were routinely maintained for such occasions. When the symbols the Russian administration had thought would near-automatically secure them the loyalty of local residents failed to attract much enthusiasm, they set out to find new historical personalities and events that would stress the region's quintessentially Russian identity. However, no local historians volunteered to work with the occupiers, and collaborators such as the Russian-installed Kherson region deputy governor Kyrilo Stremousov routinely got the names of military units and heroes wrong even as he spoke about the need to restore a commemorative cul-

¹³¹ "V Khersone ustanoviat pamiatnik Ekaterine II vmesto snesennogo v 2014 godu Lenina," *Interfax*, July 13, 2022, <https://www.interfax.ru/world/851966>.

¹³² Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork. On the removal of Dzerzhinsky's statue, see "V Khersone sniali pamiatnik Dzerzhinskomu," *Most* (blog), February 23, 2014, https://most.ks.ua/news/url/v_hersone_snjali_pamjatnik_dzerzhinskomu/.

¹³³ Ukraine even introduced new commemorative medals for them in the anniversary year of 2015: "Pershi 16 veteraniv Druhoi svitovoï viiny otrymaly novi prezidents'ki medali," *TSN*, 16, accessed July 11, 2023, <https://tsn.ua/foto/pershi-16-veteraniv-drugoyi-svitovoyi-viyni-otrimali-novi-prezidentski-medali-426310.html>.

ture supposedly destroyed by Ukraine.¹³⁴ The Kherson region provides many examples of this misguided politics of history. Military or cultural figures singled out for commemoration included Soviet war correspondent Boris Gorbatov, whose connection with Kherson consisted in having published one newspaper feature about the city's liberation in March 1944; the poet and Napoleonic-era partisan leader Denis Davydov, who spent some time there as a young boy when his father's military unit was stationed near the town; and the nineteenth-century poet Afanasii Fet, who served in the military in an area that was then part of a governorate administered from Kherson but is located hundreds of kilometers from the present-day Kherson region.¹³⁵

Over time, the Russian administrations appeared to lose interest in monuments. Whereas during the first months of the occupation, monument maintenance and associated ceremonies typically included Russian soldiers and often high-ranking Russian or proxy officials, by the late summer and fall of 2022, these tasks were increasingly left to locals and regular maintenance crews.¹³⁶

NEW MONUMENTS IN RUSSIA AND THE UKRAINIAN TERRITORIES OCCUPIED SINCE 2014

In addition to monuments newly erected or planned for the occupied territories, a number of memorials were also put up in Russia itself. While the authorities initially kept a lid on public commemoration to downplay the number of the dead, commemorative plaques and other memorials soon started appearing on the initiative of soldiers' relatives and local and regional authorities. The Russian Military Historical Society, which has increasingly established itself as the main agency in charge of building war memorials since its creation in 2012, announced plans to create commemorative plaques and statues to select "heroes" of what Russia officially termed its "special military operation" in various Russian cit-

¹³⁴ For video evidence, see Khomchenko, "Khersons'ki zradnyky."

¹³⁵ See Mykola Homanyuk, "Unter Besatzung, Eine Chronik aus Cherson," *Osteuropa*, nos. 1–2 (2023): 69–96.

¹³⁶ As documented in photos from Mykhailivka, Zaporizhzhia region, taken in August 2022. See "Rabotniki MP 'Mikhailovskii komunkhoz' priveli v poriadok pamiatniki pgt Mikhailovka," *Lenta novostei Zaporozh'ia*, August 4, 2022, <https://zp-news.ru/society/2022/08/04/12985.html>.

ies as well as in Crimea and the parts of the Donetsk region controlled by Russia since 2014.¹³⁷ Inside Russia, the names of dead soldiers were eventually added to monuments to those who died in what are known in official parlance as “local conflicts,” from Afghanistan to Syria.¹³⁸ By February 2023, less than one year into the full-scale war, around 500 commemorative plaques to Russian soldiers who had died in the invasion were also installed on school buildings.¹³⁹

The Russian authorities also continued their efforts to infuse public space with images of old and new war memorials in order to draw on the memory of past wars for justification of their military actions. Most prominently, a new 100-ruble note presented in June 2022 displays an image of the gigantic Great Patriotic War memorial near Rzhev that was inaugurated in 2020 as well as a museum complex dedicated to the Battle of Kulikovo of 1380 between the Golden Horde and several principalities of Rus'.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, existing Great Patriotic War memorials served as backdrops for funerals, post-funeral speeches, and interviews with relatives of the fallen.¹⁴¹

Finally, the full-scale invasion also had an impact on war memorials in those parts of Ukraine that Russia had controlled since 2014. The use of Second World War memorials as backdrops for commemorative ceremonies justifying the ongoing war intensified, as did maintenance and reconstruction activities and their portrayal in Russian propaganda media.

¹³⁷ “V trekh regionakh strany v Den' Rossii otkryty pamiatnye doski Geroiam Rossii—uchastnikam spetsoperatsii na Ukraine,” *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, June 14, 2022, <https://rvio.histfr.ru/activities/news/v-treh-regionah-strany-v-den-rossii-otkryty-pamyatnye-doski-geroyam-rossii-uchastnikam-specoperacii-na-ukraine>.

¹³⁸ For an example from Saratov, see “Na memoriale uvekovechili imena 44 pogibshikh na Ukraine voennykh,” *SarBK*, May 6, 2022, <http://news.sarbc.ru/main/2022/05/06/274033.html>; “Spetsoperatsiia. V parke Pobedy uvekovechili novye imena pogibshikh saratovtsev,” *Vzgliad-info*, December 9, 2022, <http://www.vzsar.ru/news/2022/12/09/specoperaciya-v-parke-pobedy-yvekovechili-novye-imena-pogibshih-saratovcev.html>. For context, see also Olga Ivshina, Becky Dale, and Joseph Lee, “Counting Russia's Dead in Ukraine—and What It Says about the Changing Face of the War,” *BBC News*, June 16, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/1d7829eaoba-5b42-499b-ad40-6990f2c4e5d0>.

¹³⁹ Avgust, “Voina eshche ne zakonchilas', a tablichki uzhe poiavilis,” *DOXA*, February 2, 2023, <https://doxa.team/articles/school-memorials>.

¹⁴⁰ “Bank Rossii vypuskaet obnovlennuiu banknotu 100 rublei,” Central Bank of the Russian Federation, June 30, 2022, http://www.cbr.ru/press/pr/?file=30062022_090638coins30062022_091534.htm; “V novoi storublevoi kupiure so Rzhevskim monumentom razgliadeli bukvy Z i V—zashifrovannye simvoly novoi pobedy,” *Vashi novosti*, July 2, 2022, <https://vnnews.ru/v-novoy-storublevoy-kupiyure-so-rzhevski/>.

¹⁴¹ Svetlana Eremeeva, *Mertvovoe vremia: Voennye pokhorony 2022 goda v Rossii i v Ukraine* (Sverdlovsk [fictitious place]: Freedom Letters, 2023), 70, 101–2, 106, 275.

These were buoyed by similar efforts in the newly occupied areas (discussed earlier in this chapter). As some of these areas were now administratively integrated into the Russian-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, monument-related activities were often presented as "republic-wide" projects. In addition, Russia's intensifying war propaganda created a demand for grand gestures, often in the form of renovating Soviet-era war memorials or building new ones. In some cases, monumental memorialization of those killed in the ongoing war on the Russian side happened almost in real time.

The most prominent example of renovation is the memorial on an ancient burial mound in the eastern part of the Donetsk region, known as Savur-Mohyla. A scene of fierce fighting during the Second World War, this mound south of the town of Snizhne was crowned with an obelisk soon after the war and later a more extensive memorial completed in 1967. In 2014, the hill changed hands between Russian and Ukrainian troops multiple times before finally remaining under Russian control. The memorial was almost entirely destroyed during the fighting, and both sides referred to the damage as evidence of continuity between German and present-day barbarity.¹⁴² Since 2014, the rulers of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic have used the memorial for lavish commemorative ceremonies linking the struggles against Germany in the Second World War with that against Ukrainian "Nazis" in the twenty-first century.¹⁴³ Renovation began in 2015 but proceeded at a relatively slow pace. Then in 2022, around the major commemorative dates in May and June, the Russian Military Historical Society fired off a series of statements about the reconstruction project, ramping up its rhetoric about the "sacrilege" of what it claimed was its destruction by Ukrainian forces.¹⁴⁴ After this, the project gathered

¹⁴² For an example of Ukrainian discourse, see "Memorial na vershyni Savur-mohyly znyshcheno," *Istorychna pravda*, August 11, 2014, <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2014/08/11/143944/>. On the rhetoric of the Russian/separatist side, see Hellbeck, Pastushenko, and Tytarenko, "Wir werden siegen," 47–48.

¹⁴³ Hellbeck, Pastushenko, and Tytarenko, "Wir werden siegen," 45–51.

¹⁴⁴ "Memorial 'Saur-Mogila' budet vosstanovlen," *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, May 6, 2022, [https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news/memorial-saur-mogila-budet-vosstanovlen](https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news/memorial-saur-mogila-budet-vosstanovlen;); "Geroi nashego vremeni budut uvekovecheny na memoriale 'Saur-Mogila,'" *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, June 14, 2022, <https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news/geroi-nashego-vremeni-budut-uvekovecheny-na-memoriale-saur-mogila/>; "Vladimir Medinskii: razrushenie memoriala Saur-Mogila sravnimo po koshchunstvu s bombezhkoi Rodiny-Materi v Volgograde," *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, June 16, 2022, <https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news/vladimir-medinskij-razrushenie-memoriala-saur-mogila-sravnimo-po-koshchunstvu-s-bombezhkoi-rodiny-materi-v-volgograde>.

speed. By September 8, the renovated memorial was reopened in a pompous ceremony—including an address by Vladimir Putin and an on-site concert, which was broadcast on central Russian television.¹⁴⁵ The opening was timed to coincide with the Day of the Liberation of the Donbas, the most important regional holiday, which since 1944 has marked the date on which Donet'sk (then Stalino) was retaken from the Germans in 1943. It also came in the middle of preparations for the sham referendum that Russia used as a pretext to formalize the annexation of the occupied regions. At the preparatory stage, Russian propaganda had declared that the memorial's "original state" would be "preserved as delicately as possible."¹⁴⁶ Yet in addition to recreated reliefs related to the Second World War, the renovated memorial includes several large-scale depictions of persons killed fighting against Ukraine since 2014, including the known war criminals Mikhail Tolstykh (aka Givi) and Arsen Pavlov (aka Motorola), as well as a paratrooper from Dagestan killed on the first day of the 2022 invasion. The silhouette of the only female commander of a DNR army unit, Ol'ha Kachura (aka Corsa), was added to one of the reliefs within the space of two days after she was killed by artillery fire in late July.¹⁴⁷

CODA: MONUMENT CONSTRUCTION AS BIG BUSINESS

In addition to its symbolic significance, monument construction is big business, with ample scope for personal enrichment. Since Soviet times, the most prominent Moscow-based monumental sculptors have been

¹⁴⁵ Vladimir Putin, "Videoobrashchenie k uchastnikam tseremonii otkrytiia vosstanovlennogo memorial'nogo kompleksa 'Saur-Mogila,'" September 8, 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69314>; Mikhail Khokhlov kompozitor, "Saur-Mogila. 08.09.2022. 'Donbass za nami,'" Youtube video, 3:03, September 8, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV-7pjHEVPo>; Rosiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo-RVIO, "Tseremoniia otkrytiia memoriala Saur-Mogila," Youtube video, 6:03, September 12, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3GqLcbBSGQ>.

¹⁴⁶ "Korrespondenty DAN obnaruzhili artefakt, kotoryi mozhet pomoch' v vosstanovlenii memoriala 'Saur-Mogila,'" *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, July 5, 2022, <https://dan-news.ru/culture/korrespondenty-dan-obnaruzhili-artefakt-kotoryj-mozhet-pomoch-v-vosstanovlenii/?lang=ru>.

¹⁴⁷ Artem Lokalov, "Na Donbasse posle rekonstruktsii otkryli memorial Saur-Mogila," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, September 14, 2022, <https://rg.ru/2022/09/14/vozvrashchenie-simvola.html>; Pavel Kutarenko, "Simvol mirnogo budushchego: memorial Saur-Mogila torzhestvenno otkryli v den' osvobozhdeniia Donbassa," *Telekanal "Zvezda"*, September 8, 2022, <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/2022982230-m5h9G.html>.

protégés of powerful political figures. Evgenii Vuchetich (1908–1974), the creator of the Treptow Park memorial in Berlin and the Motherland Calls statue in Volgograd, among many other works, had the support of many in the military leadership; Zurab Tsereteli (born 1934) had a reputation as Moscow mayor Iurii Luzhkov's court sculptor in the 1990s and early 2000s; and Salavat Shcherbakov (born 1955) has become the main author of patriotically-themed monuments in the Putin era with heavy support from the Russian Military Historical Society and its head Vladimir Medinskii, Russia's former minister of culture. All three sculptors have been accused of large-scale corruption by detractors.

In the occupation of Ukraine, too, money played a role in monument-building decisions. In March 2023, Vladimir Putin signed an order to use an unspecified amount of money from the presidential reserve fund to renovate and rebuild Great Patriotic War monuments across Russia and the Ukrainian territories it now laid claim to, as well as to build historical multimedia theme parks from the *Russia-My History* series in two of the newly annexed regions.¹⁴⁸ One such park had previously been estimated by Russian media to cost the equivalent of up to 13 million US dollars.¹⁴⁹ In another large-scale project, a team of twelve architects and sculptors including Shcherbakov proposed to build a series of “Beacons of the Russian World” on Ukrainian territory because, as they wrote, “Russia is expanding by returning to the historical territories of *Novorossiiia*. It is necessary to show the close connection and continuity between architectural solutions in Russia and in the new territories.”¹⁵⁰ The beacons, some of them constituting war memorials dedicated “To the Liberators of Donbas” or to “Peace,” were projected for construction across the occupied territories and in places Russia only hoped to conquer (Odesa) or had

¹⁴⁸ <https://t.me/SolovievLive/164126>, March 14, 2023; “Putin poruchil vydelit' sredstva na vosstanovlenie monumentov v Donbasse,” *Regnum*, March 14, 2023, <https://regnum.ru/news/3789206>. The first two parks on Ukrainian territory were opened in September 2023: “Istoricheskie parki ‘Rossiia—moia istoriia’ otkrylis’ v Luganske i Melitopole,” <https://myhistorypark.ru/for-visitors/events/v-luganske-otkryilsya-istoricheskij-park-%C2%ABrossiya-%E2%80%93moya-istoriya>, September 24, 2023.

¹⁴⁹ “Igry patriotov: skol'ko stoit park ‘Rossiia—moia istoriia’ v Krasnodare,” *RBK*, November 4, 2018, <https://kuban.rbc.ru/krasnodar/04/11/2018/5bdc5fcb9a7947335292fcf1>. On the content of the parks, see Ekaterina V. Klimenko, “Building the Nation, Legitimizing the State: Russia—My History and Memory of the Russian Revolutions in Contemporary Russia,” *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 1 (January 2021): 72–88.

¹⁵⁰ “Manifest,” *Arkhitekturnyi proekt ‘Maiaki Russkogo mira’*, 2023, <https://mayakrm.ru/manifest>.

taken and then lost (Kupians'k, Kharkiv region). One of the architects involved, Aleksei Komov, called for funding restrictions and tendering procedures to be abolished for culturally significant architectural projects. Architects, he declared, were uniquely placed to “visualize” Russia’s new “unifying ideology.” They therefore needed to “join the government; nay, become the government and build a great Russia.”¹⁵¹ No beacons were built by mid-2024, though exhibitions presenting the project took place in several cities in Russia and occupied Ukraine.

The exact amount spent on building new monuments related to the war, either in Russia or in the occupied territories, is unknown. However, the new memorials were part of Russia’s general campaign of reconstructing Ukrainian cities that had been destroyed or damaged in its own attack. The reconstruction of Mariupol’ alone was declared to cost at least the equivalent of 2.4 billion dollars, and the process was profoundly intransparent.¹⁵² Given the sheer size of monuments such as the new Savur-Mohyla memorial or the Aleksandr Nevskii statue in Mariupol’, one can assume that these projects, in addition to their other purposes, helped line the pockets of several of the people involved in their planning and construction.

¹⁵¹ Elena Serdechnova, “Arkhitektori Aleksei Komov: ‘Merilom tsennosti arkhitektury ne mozhet byt’ ekonomika,” <https://mayakrm.ru/novosti/2024/arhitektori-aleksej-komov-merilom-tsennosti-arhitektury-ne-mozhet-byt-ekonomika>. *Arkhitekturnyi proekt “Maiaki Russkogo mira,”* February 12, 2024.

¹⁵² Vladimir Prokushev, “‘Otrabotal mesiat—dali 5 tysiach’: Kak rossiiskie kompanii zarabatyvaiut na vosstanovlenii Mariupolia,” *Novaia gazeta*, February 10, 2023, <https://novaya-gazeta.ru/articles/2023/02/10/otrabotal-mesiats-dali-5-tysiach>.

