

WHAT ARE MILITARY MUSEUMS FOR? POLISH, ROMANIAN AND BULGARIAN CASE STUDIES

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The aim of the article is to present the results of the Polish – Romanian and the Polish – Bulgarian research projects (2016–2018). By examining and analyzing contemporary strategies of representing and (re)interpreting the past, manifested through the military museum exhibitions (permanent and temporary) and narratives developed around them, this paper is an attempt to answer the question: what are military museums for?

Keywords: exhibiting practices, military heritage, military museum, representation, site of memory.

Between 2016 and 2018 the team of ethnologists from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences directed by Prof. Dagnosław Demski conducted two consecutive research projects. The former, entitled “Uses of the Past. From Polish and Bulgarian perspectives”, was based on cooperation with researchers from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia. The latter, entitled “Ethnic Groups and National Minorities in Central and South-Eastern Europe (17th–21st)”, was completed in cooperation with the Institute for South East European Studies of the Romanian Academy of Sciences in Bucharest.

The Polish research team (of which I was a member) conducted their research in the Polish, Bulgarian and Romanian museums (national, municipal, ethnographic, military, among others). The aim of the study was to examine and analyze contemporary strategies of representing and (re)interpreting the past (both the “own” one and the “foreign”), manifested through the museum exhibitions (permanent and temporary) and narratives developed around them. The results of the Polish – Romanian and the Polish – Bulgarian research projects were presented in June 2018 in Bucharest during the international scientific conference entitled “Uses of the Past in Eastern and Southeastern Europe in Modern and Contemporary Period”.

Three-year long research generated extensive fieldwork material exceeding the scope of this article. Consequently, it will only examine a specific type of museum – namely, the military museum.¹ This limitation is an intentional choice of

¹ “Military museum” is a general term used to define a specific type of museums portraying the past from the perspective of military history. Their names include, among others, museums of military history,

the author, not caused by the sole fact that military museums function in all three states involved in the research. It is more related to the fact that these institutions were founded to portray a unique story of a particular nation, more importantly, however, during my research in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe². I realized that a “military museum” has become a unifying brand in its own right. It is a standardized signifier which embodies a particular set of meanings, extending far beyond the literal presentation of the military history of a selected nation. In consequence, this analysis is intended to examine the “military museum” both as a specific form of memory (and forgetting) –a site of memory, and as a “mnemonic device”, which serves specific functions not as much in the context of the past but predominantly in the context of the present. Thus, this paper is an attempt to answer the following question: what are military museums for?

THE MILITARY MUSEUMS: POLISH, BULGARIAN AND ROMANIAN CASE STUDIES

I will begin with a brief introduction of the three military museums included in this analysis. Their image presented below has been created by the museums’ authorities on their official websites, hence this vision corresponds with the policies of particular institutions and how they wish to be perceived by their audiences home and abroad (the websites of military museums in Warsaw and Sofia are available both in their national languages and in the English language version, the official website of the military museum in Bucharest is only available in Romanian).

The Polish Army Museum (*Muzeum Wojska Polskiego*) in Warsaw, located at Aleje Jerozolimskie in the center of the capital city (it was moved to this location at the turn of 1933 and 1934) was visited by me in 2017, together with a team of Bulgarian researchers. The museum, which is under the structural supervision of the Ministry of National Defense, occupies a multi-storey building with the surrounding plot of land, used as space for the open-air museum for military vehicles. The institution was founded in 1920 by executive order of the Marshall of Poland Józef Piłsudski. The first exhibition was organized in 1921 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Napoleon’s death, while the permanent exhibition was opened in 1923. The Polish Army Museum currently constitutes one of the biggest museums in Poland – the collection holds more than 250 000 artifacts and is continually

army museums, national military museums. It is, however, worth emphasizing that exhibitions concerning the war and military artifacts may also be found in other types of museums, including national museums, e.g. the exhibition devoted to the First World War in the National Museum of Romanian History (*Muzeul Național de Istorie a României*) in Bucharest in 2017. Other examples include war museums such as the Museum of The Second World War in Gdańsk (Poland).

² Though the present analysis involves only the military museums in Warsaw, Sofia and Bucharest, I had the opportunity to visit more institutions of this type in the course of my research in Central and Eastern Europe, i.e. the military museums in Riga and Belgrade.

expanded. According to the information published at the museum's official website, the permanent exhibition presents "an overview of Polish military history from the founding of the Polish state in the 10th century to the end of the Second World War in 1945. The evolution of the military technology and armament of the various branches of the Polish armed forces across the ages is displayed in chronological order. The diversity of exhibits – weaponry and armament, uniforms, banners and colors, badges, medals and decorations, as well as archival documents and photographs – offers a broad insight into the traditions of Polish arms, while our rich collection of images illustrates the key battles of Polish history".³ Besides the permanent exhibition, temporary exhibitions are also organized in the museum. The strategy pursued by the institution's management does not limit its functions to collecting, preservation, exhibition, search and acquisition of artifacts related to Polish military history. The museum is presented as a research center (specialist library and conservation studios), educational unit (offering paid classes, special museum classes, preparation for school history competitions and Olympiads) and an information and consultation center.

I visited the National Military History Museum in Sofia, located at Cherkovna Street, in 2016 and 2017, together with a team of Bulgarian researchers. Analogically as in the case of the Polish Army Museum, the military museum in Sofia occupies a multi-storey building around which an impressive outdoor exhibition of military artifacts has been organized (it includes, among others, aircrafts, tanks, artillery units and military vehicles). Even though the first steps suggesting the intention of museum establishment were undertaken by Tsar Ferdinand I in 1914, the very activities resulting in the assembly of the museum exhibition began in 1916. The first exhibition in the Main Military Museum was organized in 1937. In the course of the following decades the museum changed its name, location and organizational structure several times. The institution received its present name in 1968, along with the status of a national museum. Currently the National Military History Museum is supervised by the Bulgarian Ministry of National Defense. The museum collection holds more than a million artifacts, with the permanent exhibition amounting to around 28,000 exhibits. The permanent exhibition is organized in a thematic and chronological order, presenting the history of Bulgarian Army development since 681 until modern times. Victories of the Bulgarian Army in the Balkan War between 1912 and 1913 have been particularly emphasized in the exhibition. Temporary exhibitions are also organized in the museum. The descriptions published at the institution's official website state that "It investigates, preserves, processes scientifically and popularizes cultural valuables connected with the national and European military history".⁴ The museum advertises itself not

³ Polish Army Museum – Muzeum Wojska Polskiego, <http://www.muzeumwp.pl/o-muzeum.php> (retrieved 15.02.2019).

⁴ National Military History Museum, http://www.militarymuseum.bg/Pages/For_us/For_us-en.html (retrieved 15.02.2019).

only as an institution collecting, storing, preserving and exhibiting artifacts related to Bulgarian military history but also a research and educational center.

I visited the National Military Museum (*Muzeul Militar Național*) in Mircea Vulcănescu Street in Bucharest in 2017 (the museum has been located there since 1988). It was the only military museum where its authorities introduced a strict ban on taking any pictures, inside as well as outside the building. Similarly to the previous cases, an open-air museum was organized outside the main building. It featured technical military artifacts alongside with the elements of disassembled monuments of soldiers on pedestals. The museum was founded by king Ferdinand I in 1923 and is currently under the supervision of the Romanian Ministry of National Defense. The museum collection holds a total of 1 300 000 artifacts exhibited in a rotational manner. The permanent exhibition has been arranged chronologically, since the period of establishment of the Romanian statehood until the modern times, including all essential battles for Romanian independence. Temporary exhibitions are also organized in the museum.⁵

To sum up, each of the three military museums was founded before the outbreak of the Second World War and counts as a “national project” sponsored by the state central authorities and presenting a strictly uncentric perspective.

Moreover, it is worth noticing that the military museums in Warsaw and Sofia are located centrally in the capital cities while the military museum in Bucharest is placed outside the city center which accompanied by the lack of official website in English, makes it less accessible, especially for foreigners.

THE MILITARY MUSEUMS AS SITES OF MEMORY

Pierre Nora acknowledged that *les lieux de mémoire* (Engl. sites of memory) are places “where memory crystallizes and secrets itself”⁶, while interest in them is linked to particular historical moments. When thinking about sites of memory and searching for their meanings we usually try to understand how a particular group, society or nation understand and commemorate historical events, based in their own experience and moving within strictly defined sociocultural, historical and political frameworks.

The fact that the military museums in Warsaw, Sofia and Bucharest were founded in a clearly defined historical moment appears in no way random. All the institutions were founded briefly after the end of the First World War, and, in the case of Bulgaria – still during the conflict period. As a result of the First World War the state borders in Europe became modified (in December 1918 the so-called “Greater Romania” was proclaimed; Bulgaria lost some of its territory), new

⁵ National Military Museum, <http://muzeumilitar.defense.ro/> (retrieved 19.02.2019).

⁶ P. Nora, «Between Memory and History. *Les Lieux de Mémoire* », in V.R. Schwartz and J.M. Przybylski (eds), *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, New York – London, 2004, p. 235–237.

national states emerged (in 1918 Poland regained independence after 123 years under occupation), new political arenas were formed, fundamental values were redefined and the process of rewriting history began. These multidimensional transformations caused “a reordering of people’s entire meaningful worlds”.⁷ In these circumstances the Romanian, Bulgarian and Polish authorities were bringing military museums to life. The processes of creating collections as well as exhibitions were conducted in an authoritarian manner, imposing the narrative of the past of the state and nation adherent to the guidelines of the central authorities. Consequently, the policy of military museums was based on selecting knowledge and presenting ideas manufactured by the government system which reproduced the values of the central authorities. Already in the interwar period military museums became political arenas at which, on the one hand, the process of defining and challenging identity happened internally – for national communities the museums were meant as places articulating national identity. On the other hand, military museums were supposed to emphasize the state vision of nation’s future manifested in the concept of the past which situated particular states and nations in the framework of the European civilization, thus legitimizing their place in Europe. As a result, the state performances of the time were defined by triangulation of its three distinct publics: a) their own citizens, b) European allies, c) enemies. The military museums were national projects appointed to propagate national ideology and reinforce the narrative founded on national myths, while, at the same time, they went beyond it as, in pursuit of reaching various audiences, they had to use two orders of symbolic codes in the process of building their message. Creating military museums meant creating performative spaces, through which even “foreign” audiences could become reassured about the nation’s place in Europe and its affiliation to the European community. Additionally, the European allies were “reminded” of the necessity to support sovereignty of particular states and their integration into the imaginative landscape of Europe. Similar assumptions underlie the activity of selected museums also these days.

OBJECTS AND DISPLAYS IN MILITARY MUSEUMS

It is beyond any doubt that people who visit museums interpret exhibitions through their earlier experience, personal values or perceptive abilities, shaped as a consequence of belonging to a particular community. These factors, alongside with some additional ones, may result in the fact that some pieces of information are easily absorbed by the visitors and the others become “blocked”.⁸ Moreover, it can

⁷ See K. Verdy, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, New York, 1999.

⁸ I. Karp, « Introduction: Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture », in I. Karp and Ch. Mullen Kreamer and S.D. Lavine (eds), *Museums and Communities. The Politics of Public Culture*, Washington – London, 1992, p. 1–17.

also be influenced by particular practices of the museums, formed significantly by their exhibits. These are exactly the objects, in this case understood broadly as “any physical, tangible thing that is part of the museum experience”,⁹ with whom people can potentially interact and which play an essential role in the process of shaping their understanding of the “world”: “Objects serve as focal points for bringing ideas, thoughts, and meaning together in the same place: they aid in people’s ability to create meaning in the world”.¹⁰ Furthermore, “Objects can be touchstones for the resonances of memory, past history, present circumstances, and future aspirations”.¹¹ In military museums usually the role of the object is thought of “as part of the ‘text’ or ‘script’ of a museum exhibition that visitors might ‘read’. This view of objects and artifacts as text presumed that the object served as a specific representation of an idea, or expected a certain level of disciplinary knowledge”.¹²

Military museum is a distinct representational form. Two fundamental thematic elements shape the order and experience of a military museum, namely war and a clear distinction between the ally and the enemy, the winner and the defeated. In the case of three military museums analyzed in this article, exhibitions were constructed primarily for educational purposes and in order to create a specific narrative scheme. Thus, military museums in Warsaw, Sofia and Bucharest do not constitute a form of memory experienced through the body, which is the case of museums of occupation, Holocaust or terror.¹³ Military museums are closely linked to the portrayals of war and military artifacts. In essence, these are institutions which, through using and interpreting exhibits in a particular manner, create various interpretations of war. War can be presented both as a positive and a negative phenomenon, which depends on a variety of factors such as the selection of objects, how well preserved they are, which context they are presented in and what are the relations between the audiences and the objects.¹⁴ When researching forms of conflict representation in military museums of Northern Ireland James Scott¹⁵ identified three basic approaches in creating the representation of war: the celebratory approach, the sanitized approach and the realistic approach. The “celebratory” approach consists in building a very positive image of war through extolling achievements of armies and individual “heroes”. The “sanitary” approach creates a more neutral image of war as the exhibits are shown in alternative contexts. Finally, the “realistic” approach involves

⁹ E.E. Wood and K.F. Latham, *The Objects of Experience: Transforming Visitor-Object Encounters in Museums*, Walnut Creek, CA, 2013, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

¹¹ Ch. Mullen Kreamer, « Defining Communities Through Exhibiting and Collecting», in I. Karp and Ch. Mullen Kreamer and S. D. Lavine (eds), *Museums and Communities*, p. 367-381.

¹² E.E. Wood and K. F. Latham, *The Objects of Experience*, p. 10.

¹³ See N. Batiashvili, *What Are Sites of Memories For?*, a paper presented during the international conference “Sites of Memory of Socialism and Communism in Europe”, 2015.

¹⁴ N. Saunders, *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*, Oxford, 2004.

¹⁵ J. Scott, «Objects and the Representation of War in Military Museums», *Museum & Society*, 13, 4, 2015, p. 489–502.

portraying war in a way that is most realistic, with the aim of reminding the visitors of war horrors.¹⁶ The presented approaches constitute an open-ended model which does not reflect the full package of options. All of them confirm, however, that representation is a classificatory act in and of itself.¹⁷ These schemes are commonly used in museum practice, however, the boundaries between them are rarely clearly defined and their elements overlap. Therefore, different representations of armed conflicts can be found within a single museum space.

Each of the abovementioned approaches is realized through different methods of displaying the objects. Methods and objects may significantly influence emotions evoked in visitors such as the sense of pride or guilt, they may shape the understanding of war experience, affect the attitude towards particular armed conflicts and towards war in general. It should be borne in mind that, even though military museums are also visited by soldiers and veterans, a remarkable part of their audience consists of ordinary people (e.g. tourists, students) who have never experienced war. In consequence, their perspective on war is shaped by a combination of various media influences, including military museums, whose role is significant.

It is beyond any doubt that museums may significantly affect societies, particularly in the context of possibilities of demonstrating different points of view and different representations, serving the interests of all society members. Yet “Many communities would prefer celebrating their distant past than to examine their present circumstances. If exhibition makers are simple facilitators, they still have to decide which version of the past to articulate. If they take an active view of their role as mediators, then they are likely to present material and views other than those provided by the community that created the objects they may wish to exhibit. A solution of this problem will be found only if exhibitions turn from monologue to conversation”.¹⁸ In theory efforts are undertaken to delineate policies which enable passing information on to the audiences at the local, national and international level. Moreover, it is generally assumed that history should be communicated effectively and represents the interests of those who belong to the museum environment and a given community as well as those who remain „outside”. In practice, none of the three military museums described in the present article successfully pursues such policy. Military museums in Warsaw, Sofia and Bucharest use their official websites to announce their massive collections of military artifacts originating from different historical periods. These objects demonstrate different scale, value and degree of preservation, however, only a part of them has been used to create museum exhibitions, including representations of wars. Thousands of objects are not available for visitors, while the selection of those displayed (including their descriptions) is conducted in an authoritarian manner by the

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 490.

¹⁷ N. Batiashvili, *What Are Sites of Memories For?*

¹⁸ S.D. Lavine, « Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities », in I. Karp and Ch. Mullen Kreamer, and S.D. Lavine (eds), *Museums and Communities*, p. 137–157; see also R. Sandell, *Museums, Society, Inequality*, London, 2003.

museum employees who, in the same way, create specific visions of the past. In each case the exhibited objects are subjected to musealization, consequently “When an object is musealized, it goes through a process of physical or conceptual extraction from its original, natural, or cultural environment, giving it museal status and transforming it into a museum object”.¹⁹

When portraying the past of a selected community from the military angle, each of the three military museums uses the “celebratory” approach in the process of creating representations and interpreting past military conflicts. This approach is not only frequently used but also clearly visible in the context of permanent exhibitions. Due to it, the visitors’ attention becomes directed towards past military victories and achievements of a given group, which, in turn, is linked to the process of commemorating the dead and creating national “heroes”. It appears that in the interwar period, when military museums were being established and national states found it extremely important to recruit new soldiers, such approach was not irrelevant to creating positive feelings towards the army and encouraging potential candidates to join it. The use of “celebratory” approach is based on incorporating national narratives presenting both a given nation and its army in a positive light. In this way a lopsided representation of war and particular armed conflicts is created. Such approach emphasizes, among others, medals and badges (usually in large amounts and simultaneously), dress uniforms, decorations or finely embellished weaponry. Interestingly, notwithstanding that, for instance, in Poland “Both the presence of foreign uniforms and Poles wearing foreign uniforms are historically common phenomena”,²⁰ “celebratory” approach does not involve exhibiting foreign uniforms or consider them elements of the military heritage. In such context “The Polish uniform emerged (...) as a symbol of a glorious past; it symbolizes sacrifice but it is also associated with hope for the future”.²¹ Thus, the problem lies within the fact that objects removed from the context tend to aestheticize war or, when combined with a simplified interpretation of a conflict, even trivialize it. Such presentation manner may result in creating a falsified image of war by evoking the feeling of nostalgia for war and creating a seductive portrayal thereof.

Described military museums also feature various elements of the “sanitary” approach,²² which is not meant to create a positive war image, but rather to demonstrate negative aspects of an armed conflict in a “secure” way, namely without using violent imagery or being realistically literal. The portrayal of war created in this manner comes out more neutral than the war reality. An example of objects exhibited using such approach often includes various types of weapons.

¹⁹ E.E. Wood and K.F. Latham, *The Objects of Experience*, p. 44.

²⁰ D. Demski, «Values, Substantiality, and Passage of Time: Representations and Reinterpretations of Military Heritage», *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 70, 2017, p. 171–192. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2017.70.demski>.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

²² A. Whitmarsh, «We Will Remember Them: Memory and Commemoration in War Museums», *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, 7, 2001, p. 11–15.

Despite the fact that at times of armed conflicts weapons are tools with which the process of destruction is performed, military museums rarely exhibit weapons in the context of victims and material damage and often present it in the framework of military technology advancement. Providing various technical details concerning selected types of weaponry and presenting it in the context of particular stages of military technology production development does not create a false image of war, however, it “disguises” the fact that this very weaponry was used to kill people or destroy cities.²³ As a result, this form of portrayal may lead to a certain idealization of the military technique and presenting military technology solely from the perspective of technological advancement, at the same time removing the questions of moral responsibility from the debate.

Furthermore, displaying innovative character of the technical solutions may appear not only as one of the aspects of modernity but also as an essential part of the process of symbolically emphasizing the power of a selected group, gaining advantage over the enemy and defensive skills. This manner of presenting military history may indicate which elements the members of a given community should be proud of. Weapons sometimes happen to be presented as decorative objects or even works of art, which may lead to their complete abstracting from real destination or past functions. At the era of development of historical reenactments,²⁴ the technical dimension of militarism is attracting an increasing number of audiences or even enthusiasts.

The “realistic” approach, whose aim is to demonstrate the cruelty and horror of war preserving complete realism, developed as a form of protest against two preceding approaches and the application of peculiar censorship by the majority of military museums.²⁵ One of the ways in which this approach manifests itself in museum exhibitions may be juxtaposing particular types of weapons and archival photos demonstrating the results of their practical use (e.g. photographs of victims’ bodies). Even though some examples of such approach appeared in the analyzed museums, for instance during the temporary exhibition in the National Military History Museum in Sofia in 2017, such practices count as exceptional rather than regular.

The use of the “sanitary” approach and, particularly, the “celebratory” approach by military museums contributes to creating representations of war which often overlook the suffering of victims and especially of those, who were the opponents in a given conflict. Moreover, the abovementioned approaches draw a fine line between the winners and the defeated, which is most often situated along national

²³ R. Raths, «From Technical Showroom to Full-Fledged Museum: The German Tank Museum Munster», in W. Muchitsch (ed.), *Does War Belongs to Museums*, Bielfield, 2013, p. 83–91.

²⁴ K. Baraniecka-Olszewska, *Reko-rekonesans: praktyka autentyczności. Antropologiczne studium odtwórstwa historycznego drugiej wojny światowej w Polsce*, Kęty, 2018.

²⁵ J. Scott, «Objects and the Representation of War in Military Museums», p. 495; J. Winter, «Museums and the Representation of War», in W. Muchitsch (ed.), *Does War Belongs to Museums*, Bielfield, 2013, p. 21–41.

borders. As a result, a simplified narrative is created which neglects questions, like the activity of the local perpetrators or traitors. In consequence, representations of war formulated on this basis may evoke negative emotions of the members of other nations or their objections against the “false” vision of the past, which does not facilitate the development of intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. Moreover, the choice of a particular approach does impact the educational practices as well.

MILITARY MUSEUMS – MILITARY HERITAGE

According to the information provided on official websites of military museums in Warsaw, Sofia and Bucharest all three institutions systematically collect and preserve historical artifacts. Therefore, these institutions may be treated as sources of historical knowledge accumulated by professional researchers. For visitors, the museums “can create a sense of kinship with the past. The disposition of men to seek continuity with their ancestors and with life in earlier times may find its fulfillment in museums”.²⁶ Consequently, military objects and narratives built around them may help recall the military past of a given nation and the impression that the members of a given group are the descendants of their ancestors, who survived due to their genius, resilience and sacrifice.

It is beyond any doubt that “A museum may be established in order to exhibit what is acknowledged as the local heritage to make the community aware of what it can be proud of”.²⁷ Military museums actively participate in the process of creating military heritage, which is not only a part of cultural heritage but also national heritage. Although there function numerous definitions of “heritage”, which in specialist literature should be distinguished from the definition of “legacy”, for the purpose of the present analysis I assume that “heritage is not only a product of the present time, but also of a long process of relating history, through which communities recognize themselves precisely as communities”,²⁸ whilst “History becomes heritage in various ways. Artifacts become appropriated by particular historical agendas, by particular ideologies of preservation, by specific versions of public history, and by particular values about exhibition, design, and display”.²⁹ Being a part of cultural heritage, military heritage is created by contemporary people through processes of selection and categorization. In the case of military museums the choices are made in authoritarian manner by people responsible for collecting, storing and exhibiting

²⁶ J.H. Ewing, « Military Museums and Collections», in J.E. Jessup and Jr. and R.W. Coakley (eds), *A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History*, Washington, 1988, p. 339–347.

²⁷ D. Demski and D. Czarna, «A Site Shaped by Discontinuity: the Practices of Place-Making in a Post-Soviet Military Base in Poland», *Suomen Antropologi. Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*, 43, 2, 2018, p. 30–52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30676/jfas.v43i2.69843>.

²⁸ D. Demski, «Values, Substantiality, and Passage of Time», p. 176.

²⁹ A. Appadurai and C.A. Breckenridge, «Museums Are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India», in I. Karp and Ch. Mullen Kreamer and S.D. Lavine (eds), *Museums and Communities*, p. 34–55.

objects. Everything which becomes exhibited in military museums is presented as a part of the military heritage of a given nation or even a larger community, for example the European one.³⁰ In consequence, the role of the visitor in this case does not require wondering what qualifies as military heritage and what does not, because the choice had already been made by the authorities. Visitors should somewhat automatically assume that all the objects exhibited by the museum count as military heritage. As a result, the process of manufacturing military heritage by military museums is authoritarian and controlled by institutions' employees. Moreover, it is linked to economic³¹ and political arguments, "Heritage, even when it is created in order to reconcile present with past, often becomes the object of political interest."³² To sum up, in the context of military museums, heritage is created by specialized institutions, which is obviously related to political authority.

CONCLUSION

The present article was an attempt to analyze ways of representing and (re)interpreting past in the present, and, consequently, answer the question: what are military museums for? Research conducted in three institutions – military museums in Warsaw, Sofia and Bucharest – demonstrated that, on the one hand, each of these museums intends to portray a unique story of a particular nation, thus serving significant functions in the context of "internal" needs of a given community. In this context, military museums appear as places in which identity is articulated. As a result, the aim of creating particular exhibitions consists in reinforcing the identity of a given nation, which is not irrelevant for educational practices undertaken by particular institutions.³³ On the other hand, in a broader context, a "military museum" has become a unifying brand in its own right, appearing as a standardized signifier, which embodies particular meanings extending beyond literal presentations of military history of a given nation. The museums analyzed in this article demonstrate a number of similarities in the context of the functions they serve, place in organizational structure, ways of creating representations of war as well as constructing narrative schemes. All three institutions replicate similar solutions,

³⁰ National Military History Museum, http://www.militarymuseum.bg/Pages/For_us/For_us-en.html (retrieved 15.02.2019).

³¹ T. Peil, «Estonian Heritage Connections-People, Past and Place: The Pakri Peninsula», *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 11, 1, 2005, 53–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250500037021>.

³² D. Demski and D. Czarnecka, «A Site Shaped by Discontinuity», p. 42; see also D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge, 1998.

³³ While in Warsaw and Bucharest educational practices consist mainly in special museum classes, the military museum in Sofia organized a special exhibition dedicated to children. It includes several "military style" rooms adjusted to children's perceptive capacity, where they can learn through playing (copies of military objects are used for this purpose).

which results in the fact that a visitor experiences comparable representation and interpretation schemes in different geographical locations. Since the visitor is reassured in the “accuracy” of the manner of representing military history replicated in different places, his expectations are gradually shaped on this basis and, as the time goes by, these expectations become somehow automatically referred to a “military museum” as a particular type of institution. Military museums appear to be authoritarian institutions which involve a process of paring down multiple voices and complex identities into relatively clear messages. Certain differences may also be observed between the three described institutions. The military museum in Bucharest, unlike the museums in Sofia and Warsaw, is located outside the city center and does not offer a website in English, which makes it less accessible. Moreover, during the visit in the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw crowds of visitors could be observed, while both in Sofia and in Bucharest few people were present at the institutions. It is difficult to clearly determine reasons for this situation (political situation, economic condition, location, lack of interest for the topic?).

In conclusion, bearing in mind the activity and ways of functioning of military museums, it is worth emphasizing that “Just as museums have the obligation to examine the consequences of their own exhibiting and educational practices, so communities have the responsibility to see that exhibitions about themselves are more than celebratory”.³⁴

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³⁴ I. Karp, «On Civil Society and Social Identity», in I. Karp and Ch. Mullen Kreamer and S.D. Lavine (eds), *Museums and Communities*, p. 19–33.