

MEMORIAL IN CONTEXT: A SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF BOGDANOVIĆ'S "MOUND OF THE UNBEATEN"

ABSTRACT

The subject of this paper is a case study of the "Mound of the Unbeaten" (*Могила на непобедените*). The memorial complex is located in the Memorial Park of the Revolution in Prilep, the Republic of North Macedonia, and was erected in 1961. The author of the spatial design, landscape and architecture of the memorial complex, as well as the choice of location, is the architect Bogdan Bogdanović, one of the most prominent authors of memorial architecture throughout Yugoslavia. The research places a special focus on the spatial perception of the memorial complex, its carefully guided sensory experience through on-site movement and its relation to the natural and historical context. The research relies on primary sources, archival material analysis and a memorial complex visit. Through multi-layered spatial analysis, with the placement in a contextual and historical framework, the work contributes to the understanding of the complexity of Bogdanović's creativity, evaluation of his artistic-spatial and cultural expression and to comprehending memorial architecture as a complex cultural, spatial and sensory experience and a work of art.

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KEY WORDS
BOGDAN BOGDANOVIĆ
MEMORIAL ARCHITECTURE
SPATIAL ANALYSIS
ARCHITECTURE OF REMEMBRANCE
PRILEP

1. PLACING THE MEMORIAL: HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL REPRESENTATION

The Revolution Memorial Park in Prilep was erected on the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the Partisan resistance in the city of Prilep, a significant centre of the People's Liberation Movement in Macedonia, Yugoslavia. The formation of the First Prilep Partisan Detachment and the attack on the Bulgarian Nazi allies marked the beginning of the uprising of the Macedonian people against the occupying forces on October 11th 1941. It is believed that of the 25,000 inhabitants of Prilep, over 8,000, i.e., one in three, directly participated in the armed struggle (Ristovski, 2009).

In 1960, it was announced that Prilep would be declared a partisan hero city and would commemorate the 20th anniversary of the first uprising. For this occasion, the Mayor of Prilep turned to the Belgrade architect Bogdan Bogdanović, who at that time had realised the Monument to the Jewish Victims of Fascism in Belgrade had just completed the construction of the necropolis in Sremska Mitrovica and had begun work on the memorials in Jasenovac, Mostar, Kruševac and Kosovska Mitrovica (Bogdanovic, 1973). Prilep architect Duško Najdoski, a contemporary of these events, points out that the city authorities invited Bogdanović to design the memorial also because he had worked on the urban plan of the city of Prilep in Belgrade, in collaboration with Oliver Minić (O. Minić, personal communication, June 2018).

The city authorities proposed three potential locations. For one of them, Marko's Towers, the remains of a medieval fortress on a stone mountain massif, there already was a proposal for the design of a memorial – figures of partisans carrying the marble flag. Bogdanović did not accept any of the proposed locations or solutions, but he chose a place near the city, where there was a park named “Mogila” before the Second World War. The park is located on a gentle hill and on a plateau overlooking Marko's Towers. It is surrounded by nature but easily accessible and connected by road to the city of Prilep. Commenting that “any Greek builder would be happy to build there”, Bogdanović characterised the chosen site as a place for an „air monument”, a monument whose symbolic element is the sky“(Kommac & Guillen, 2011)

Park “Mogila” extends on the southern outskirts of Prilep on 7,5ha. With a landscaped character, today, the park is horticulturally landscaped, with pine forests, evergreen flora, floral meadows, lakes and paths. It consists of three zones: a central, an active and a passive rest zone. The central zone consists of the Memorial Park of the Revolution, with its three parts: the Alley of the People's Heroes lined with busts, the Flower Alley, the road leading to the

common crypt, and the memorial complex. The memorial complex designed by architect Bogdan Bogdanović consists of a common grave/crypt and monumental sculptures (Sandeva et al., 2014).

The memorial complex in Prilep presents a viable factor in the life of the local community. Maintained since its inception, in 1989, it was declared a cultural monument, and in 2007-2008, it was completely renovated. It is a place of numerous manifestations of the city of Prilep. The importance of the memorial complex for the city is evidenced by the fact that its marble figures have been symbolised on the coat of arms of the city municipality of Prilep (<https://www.prilepinfo.mk>).

2. MEMORIAL COMPLEX, THE OVERVIEW

The memorial complex extends over two plateaus, positioned along the north-western-south-eastern axis, and consists of a whole of eight monumental sculptures made in white marble (in further work, the term *figure* will be used), a ring-shaped tomb-crypt and a mound whose inner open part is paved with white marble plaques. The 35 memorial plaques present the names of 462 fallen Prilep fighters, and the crypt houses their remains (*Mogila na nepobedenite*, 2014).

The positioning of figures on the site was carried out without pre-prepared schemes and plans. Bogdanović brought several children from a nearby school to the very location and instructed them where to stand. Seeing their bodies in space and experiencing the position of the figures in live, he finally determined their locations (Kommac&Guillen, 2011). Seven of the eight figures appear identical, while the eighth differs visibly - in height, slimness and *capital*. It is stated that the client complained that the proposed figures were not monumental enough to present a symbol of victory, so Bogdanović introduced the eighth figure that differs in size and shape. (Kommac&Guillen, 2011)

The Bianco Sivec marble of Macedonia was used to create the memorial. This type of marble is typical of the area. The “Mermeren Combine”, a recognisable enterprise of Prilep (founded in 1946), dug it in mines in the immediate vicinity (Lawler, 2012). Bogdanović entrusted the creation of the figures to local stonemasons as the greatest connoisseurs and experts (Kommac&Guillen, 2011). Bogdanović stayed only a few days with the masters to help them create the first forms based on preliminary studies, which were not documented and then left them to work alone (Bogdanović, 2001).

The Marko's Towers, a medieval fortress above Prilep, does not form a physical unit with the memorial complex. However, the choice of location and the visual connection indicate its role in the spatial experience at the memorial complex itself. The fortress is located on a high stone hill and is proclaimed the natural good of the Republic of North Macedonia. During the Middle Ages, Marko's Towers, a.k.a Marko's Town, was the capital of the Serbian Empire under Dušan and then the state of the Serbian King Marko, as it was the former town of Prilep before its descent into the valley. The medieval fortification is located on a rocky peak that rises above the city on the imposing mountain range Čardak, Krupnik, Grebnik and Tapanče. Several grandiose rocks are connected in two parallel series that merge with the peaks Zlatovrv (1422 m) and Lipa (1392 m). Naturally spectacular, the unusual structure, the age of the rocky landscape, and its historical significance caused the proclamation of the site of the Marko's Towers, a natural good of the Republic of North Macedonia. According to archaeological research, there was continual life at the site from the 10th to the 14th century, as well as the ancient settlement of Keramija. Tombs, dwellings, churches, shrines, and stone drawings that are thought to date back to the 7th century BC have been found at the site (Ristovski, 2009).

3. SPATIAL ELEMENTS OF THE MEMORIAL COMPLEX AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

Eight figures are placed on an ellipsoidal plateau measuring approximately 19 m wide and 20 m long. The plateau is two steps raised relative to the paved terrain. The geometry of the plateau does not close the full ellipse, but on the southeast side, in the direction of the mound, it is concavely "bitten". The figures are arranged in space without any observable geometric order. They are made of roughly processed Prilep marble. The seven figures are approximately the same height, 2.9 m, and consist of three marble elements – two elements as *entasis* and the third as *capital*. The eighth monolith, the eighth figure, is visibly different: it is about 5 m in height, consisting of four marble elements, the lower two with carved cannelure furrows, while *the capital* is enriched with a central bulge.

The capitals of all figures have two different projections, which cannot be viewed at the same time. One projection resembles the form of an inverted Ionian capital with reverse currencies, while the other gives the impression of a stylised face with pronounced lips. The capitals are rotated relative to each other in a seemingly random order; by observing more than one figure, both projections of the capital are always observed.

A circular ring-like tomb – the crypt is an open, hollowed mound with a diameter of 7.40 m and a height of 3 m (Belčeski, 2016). It is positioned on the paved terrain. The inner open part is paved with white smooth marble memorial plaques, on which are engraved the names of the fighters, which alternately shear from each other. The lower diameter of the rings formed by marble plaques is narrower than the upper one, opening the circular inner space to the sky. The inner open part is accessed from the direction of the figures. Resembling the letter omega, marble slabs not only cover the walls of the inner circular space but also spill over to the front plane of the entrance part.

The paved terrain of the memorial complex is designed to follow the geometry of the raised plateau of figures, in width of 3.5 meters, and the geometry of the ring mound, in width of 1.5 meters. The plateau of figures and the annular mound are positioned opposite each other, and so the paved terrain is in the form of the number eight, with the narrowest part between the plateau and the mound. The outer edge of the paved terrain is accompanied by a cut in natural terrain, which is why it is possible to step on the paved terrain of the memorial complex unhindered only through the access paths.

FIGURE 1: Site plan of the memorial complex, Author's sketches

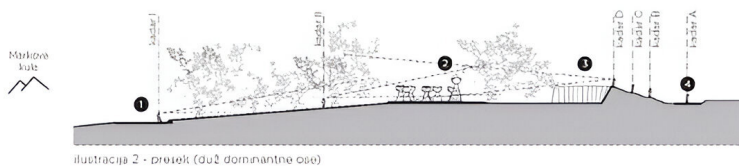
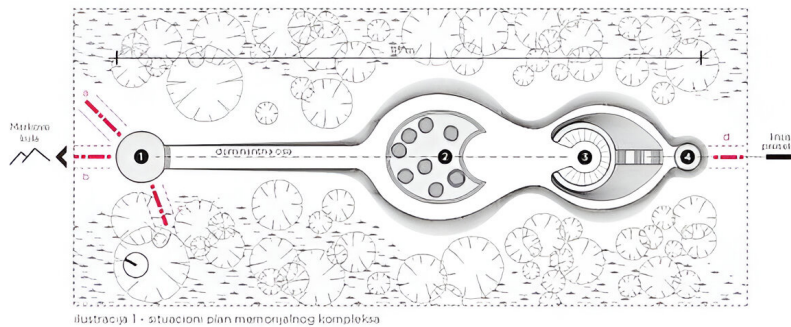


FIGURE 2: Section 1, Author's sketches

3.1 Approaches – discovering the memorial complex

The Park of the Revolution can be accessed from four directions: north-east (*a*), north-west (*b*), south-west (*c*) and south-east (*d*).”

The main entrance lies on the northeast access (*a*), and from the main road forms one of the two main axes of the city’s narrow core (Samoil Street). The entrance to the park is located at the lowest point. From there, the Alley of the People’s Heroes is accessed. Walking along the park’s access park (*a*), on the left side and at the higher elevation, a series of 12 busts of People’s Heroes, fallen fighters of the city of Prilep, follows. The access path and the environment are characterised by the orthogonality of the dominant directions: promenades, side retaining walls, Alley of the People’s Heroes, as well as the orthogonality of the bust posts and the strict uniformity of their positioning, as well as identical dimensional characteristics.

The natural movement of the park terrain was incised by inserting the Alley of the People’s Heroes. The back boundary of the spatial whole of the Alley was cut off with a retaining wall. Its organic geometry is in contrast to the dominant orthogonal geometry, and so it anticipates the motion that follows at the memorial itself. The ending of the spatial whole of the Alley on the approach axis is subtly indicated by the abolition of the side retaining walls. Soon after, there is a slight howling of the access path, which cuts the possibility of observing deeper into the park. After a gentle climb in the length of 180 meters (with the slope of the trail and an external staircase arranged along the path in the range of 1-4 steps), a two-step high circular plateau (*I*) is reached.

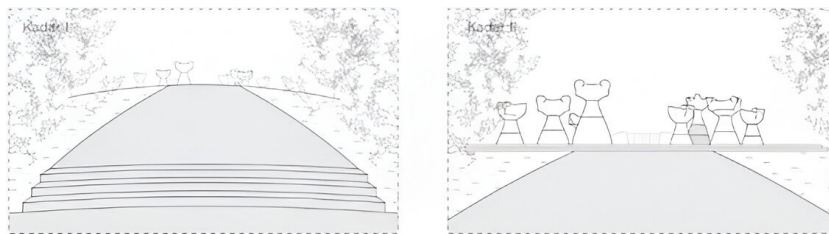
The circular plateau (*I*) represents an access point from which four directions are radiantly forked: the direction of the main entrance (north-east/*a*), the direction of the secondary entrance (north-west/*b*), the side entrance (south-west/*d*) i.e. the path that serves the rest of the park; the direction (south-east/*d*) that leads towards the memorial complex.

Upon entering the circular plateau (*I*), the first visual encounter with the memorial complex is revealed. Several figures are visible in the distance and on the elevation on the left side in relation to the direction of access (*a*). A view to the right, at the lower elevation of the secondary entrance (*b*), presents Marko’s Tower far behind the city.

Bogdanović’s sketches of the memorial reveal an introduction to a 115 m long axis (hereinafter: *the dominant axis*) along which he developed a

memorial complex, following the arrow on the drawing that points towards Marko's Towers. Field measurement indicates that the zero point of the axis is a circular access plateau (1), while the opposite endpoint of the axis is located on a small circular plateau at the back of the mound (4).

The northwest (b) and southeast (d) entrances to the park are located in the extension of the dominant axis. The northwest (b) entrance is positioned at the lowest elevation on the axis, from where a straight path leads to the park in an easily surmountable climb and is intersected by a series of low stairs. By climbing the path, the memorial complex is gradually revealed. First visible are the white tops of the capitals in the distance. With each subsequent step, the capitals are revealed more, to be seen as a whole, followed by the revelation of entasis, observed from a worm's-eye view. When entering the circular plateau (1), only the most protruding figure is seen. The other seven are gradually revealed by climbing the access path along the dominant axis (Figure 3: frame I). Only when reaching the memorial complex is the front part of the ring crypt revealed, coated in the same tone as the figures with its marble plaques (Figure 3: frame II). The access path ends on the two-step elevated plateau (2), on which eight marble figures are located.



Ilustracija 3 - otkrivanje: pravac b

FIGURE 3: Discovering: access path b, (Frames I – II), Author's sketches

The other end of the dominant axis is directed to the entrance at the back of the park (in relation to the city of Prilep at the time of the construction of the memorial). The straight and flat path (d) leads from this back entrance to the park, located along the dominant axis. The stairs descend to the lower elevation, leading to a small circular plateau (4) just in front of the mound, the endpoint of the direction of 115 m. From a small circular plateau (4), only the green mound of the tomb-crypt in the park greenery is visible. Along its centre, following the dominant axis, a cut is made by a stone stairway (Figure 4: frame A).

When climbing the stairway in the direction of the dominant axis, the tops of the Marko's Towers and the bulging top, the capital of the highest figure (Figure 4: frame B), are visible in the distance. With each following step, the marble peaks - the capitals of the other seven figures rise in front of Marko's Towers. Their positioning is such that they visually close the incomplete loop made of the tops of the cripts' marble memorial plaques, dynamically breaking the rhythm of horizontality with the height differences (created by the volumetrics of figures, but also by their positioning in space) and different orientations of the capitals. (Figure 4: frame C). After completing the climb, the highest elevation of the mound is reached. From this position, an open loop of the memorial plaques of the crypt and the figures are fully seen, thus viewing the figures as a whole and independently of the loop. From this highest point along the dominant axis, it could be observed: in the foreground, a loop of the tops of memorial plaques in the shape of the letter omega open to the figures, the figures as a whole in the background and along a vertical axis placed in the horizontal opening of the ring of the memorial and displaced in space relative to each other, and the peaks of Marko's Towers in the third, outermost plan (Figure 4: frame D).

After stepping on the highest elevation of the ring mound, the visitor must return to the stairs. The rest of the memorial complex is "rediscovered" by circling the green mound, with the figures gradually revealed in their full size.

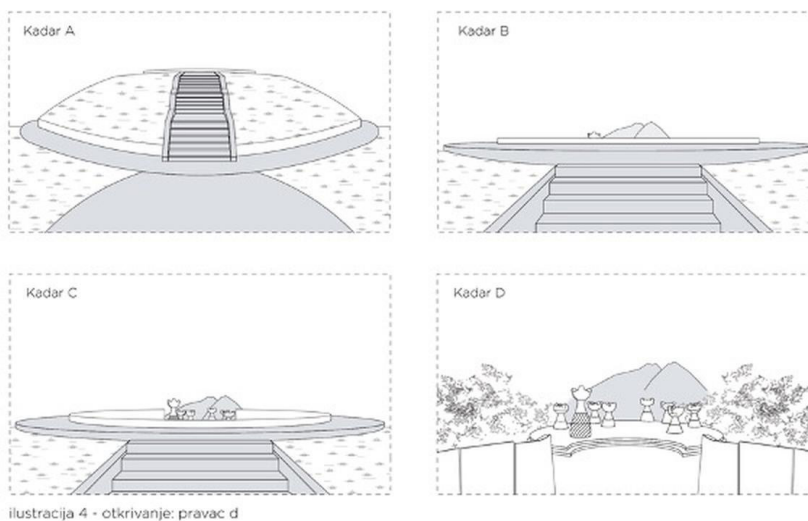


FIGURE 4: Discovering: access path d (Frames A – D), Author's sketches

3.2. Interpretation - reading plans: a, b and c

Approaching the memorial from the lowest point, in the distance and on the elevation, the peaks of the white marble capitals rise in front of the sky as a background. Observed from the distance along the approach direction *b* (plan a), the white figures carry the lightness of the clouds. With each subsequent step, their lightness is hindered by the rising of their (seemingly) monolithic *entasis*. By entering the plateau (2), visitors are among the “scattered” figures, only much higher than a human figure. The figures stick out in height but do not occupy the surrounding space (plan b) (*Figure 4*). The surrounding capitals entice for their closer inspection. Approaching the monoliths, the roughly processed white marble comes to the fore, and the capitals rise above the visitors, giving the impression of a heavy, imposing monumental sculptural work (plan c).

3.3 Interpretation – movement

Walking through the monument complex following the envisaged paths and freely on the plateaus, one is accompanied by the constant dynamics of the elements and the discovery of vistas. Movement (III) is a motif that strongly permeates the Prilep memorial. Bogdanović conveys the experience of movement by seemingly randomly arranging eight figures on the plateau and with successive rotations of the two-faced capitals. The slightly uneven height of the seven figures contributes to perceiving movement, and so does the extremely high eighth monolith and the shifting of the walls of the inner ring of the mound (in both horizontal and vertical planes). In addition, the relief of the figures, the sculpture of their capitals and the successive rotations bring the play of light and shadow with the sun moving across the park.

With skilful framing, Bogdanović introduces the temporal experience of space. Upon entering the memorial complex from the direction of *d*, the serenity of the mound’s greenery is aroused by the curiosity triggered by a centrally positioned stairway in an unknown direction, the emergence of the peaks of the imposing natural beauty of Marko’s Tower and the highest figure, with a protruding “cap” of the capital. On the next level of discovery, the impression of the depth of plans is lost, and instead, one feels trapped by eight figures in the loop of the crypt. The tension of the static moment in which the plans are visually equalised escapes in the next, the final frame. The interrelationship of elements portrays the impression of lightness, *liberation and elevation* (IV): an omega-shaped crypt in perspective that opens to the figures in a higher horizontal projection plane freely distributed in space, the contrasting white in relation to the scenery of the mountain peaks. The friction of the entire

loop allows movement along the highest elevation path, revealing the new experience of figures moving in relation to each other and the surrounding elements and landscape.

3.4 Mutual relationship of elements - dichotomy and dialogue

The motif of dichotomy (I) permeates the memorial design. It is expressed in the bi-facility of the capital, the rough processing of the marble figures in contrast to the finely polished marble plaques of the ring crypt, the strict and regular geometry of the ring crypt contrasting seemingly randomly placed and freely rotated figures of different heights.

The placement of two “opposing” elements on paved terrain that follows their geometry and is separated from the natural terrain by cuttings creates the impression of *framing* them into a single dichotomous whole. The shape of the number eight, with the narrowest part of the terrain between the elements, draws the impression of their mutual connection while emphasising the opposites.

The primary setting of the elements can be read as a reinterpretation of the relationship between parts of an ancient theatre. The firmly established mound takes on the model of the theatre - auditorium, precise in its stable form, while playful figures are seemingly randomly placed on a circular platform, like an ancient orchestra. The presence of *the bitten* part of the circular platform in the zone towards the mound contributes to another possible way of reading the dialogue (II) between these two opposing forms as interdependent from each other.

4. APPENDIX: SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION

Bogdanović draws his stronghold and inspiration for memorials from the local context, in the region’s geological, ethnic, and cultural character. Through his memoirs and public appearances, he presents some of his ideas and references for the Memorial in Prilep but at the same time emphasises, in a Gnostic manner, an unequivocal contempt for the unambiguous interpretation of symbols.

Bogdanović refers to this memorial, as well as many of his memorials, as “feminine”, emphasising the role of women as a symbol of continuity in the funeral and memorial architecture of ancient civilisations. In his memoirs of Prilep, he describes the figures as two-faced caryatids, with two beast-like faces each, which, in frontal projections, lose their human outlines and turn

into what they really are: “luxurious pillars with capitals archaic, Asia Minor, Ionian; with volutes in spite inversed from bottom to top “. (Bogdanović, 2001:124). In this interpretation, the heads of the figures are at the same time Ionian capitals, with which the symbol of a woman is associated. Their spatial design and motif of *movement* can then be read as a dance, a traditional Macedonian wheel, a *posthumous wheel of women around a fallen hero* (Catalogue for the Exhibition in Sao Paulo, 1974). The memorial also permeates duality, the symbol of the number 2, the allegory of symmetry, and the bi-facility of women as an expression of the god Janis (the beginning and end of all things). In Bogdanović’s later work, drawings of motifs very similar to the Prilep figures can be found in the role of Ionian columns that carry an ancient temple. In the case of Prilep, the temple is the sky, towards which it directs the opening of the ring mound.



FIGURE 5: Presentation of the symbolism of the Prilep necropolis (source: Catalogue of the Sao Paulo Architecture Biennale (1973))

Numerous symbolic interpretations could be read in Bogdanović’s work, which would require an exhaustive analysis of a different character. At the Prilep Memorial, they can be distinguished as the dominant motive of a woman and the confrontation of the relationship between life and death. The sketches Bogdanović drew in the years following the construction of the memorial increasingly emphasise the motive of woman, even in floor plan design, with key spots in the position of the reproductive organs.

In this sense, Bogdanović's philosophy that life is stronger than death, at the Prilep Memorial is read in the present dichotomy (II) of life and death (bifaciality, Janis: beginning/end, the roughly treated marble: relief – live/polished marble: petrified – dead, the playful form - life/stiffened form - death), in the liberation of life and the motif of heaven as the elevation of life above death (IV), the constant circular connection in the dialogue of life and death (II), and in rebirth (the motif of the woman) and the movement (III) as the dominant motif symbolising the celebration of the living.

5. CONCLUSION

The spatial analysis of Bogdanović's memorial in Prilep, in relation to context and historical framework, provides an insight into the complexity of Bogdanović's creativity and a careful reflection on different elements of the composition, from the macro to the micro plan, both individually and interacting. Bogdanović skilfully uses kinetic elements of spatial experiencing and designs and positions the main elements in relation. By reflecting on proportional, design and volumetric relationships, the environment and landscape, perceptions and directions of movement, Bogdanović creates a complex spatial experience that the visitor discovers through several levels of reading. The spatial design emerges from the peculiarities of the local context and culture, thus achieving an experiential whole. The Prilep Memorial "The Mound of the Unbeaten", one of the author's first works, which, with an artistically and experientially rich spatial-shaped solution that communicates with the local context, positions Bogdanović as a prominent author of memorial architecture on the territory of Yugoslavia in the 20th century and contributes to the significant cultural and historical heritage of the city of Prilep.

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