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Carved memorial poles as means of symbolic spatial occupation in the circle of Hungarians in Slovakia.

Summary

After the change of political system in the year of 1989, a number of various newly-built monuments and memorial boards accentuating national fellowship has significantly increased among the Hungarians in Slovakia. From among those the most preferred are carved wooden memorial poles /in Hungarian called „kopjafa /. These are as a matter of fact the Protestant steles – gravestones. Nevertheless, the scientific research has proved that a stele cannot be integrated in the oldest rank of Hungarian folk art, further more it can neither be determinately associated with a particular ethnic group. By the effect of various artistic, culturally-political influence lines, it appears in the public awareness as one of the „best selling“ elements of the Hungarian /folk art/ culture, as a distinct Hungarian symbol.

In accordance with our evidence, the first carved pole in Slovakia was built in 1977 in Nová Stráž near Komárno, by the occasion of the I. Summer educational camp, which was organised by university students and members of intelligence group both of Hungarian nationality. In the following years, simultaneously with the organisation of similar camps in the whole Hungarians lived-in area of Slovakia, the practice of building of such carved poles has widespread, as well. Since the first opportunity up until these days – during the most various occasions / political, formal cultural, religious and similar/ they have built more than three hundred of these poles.

Increasing number of memorial poles, as well as their areal widespread resulted that the rank of their forms and also the symbols on them displayed has markedly increased. The primary Hungarian national symbols, such as Saint Stephen crown or so called Kossuth's sign have appeared on them. Concerning the inscriptions, here we encounter the various modifications as well. The ceremonious display of these poles is always associated with some ceremony and cultural show. Among the invited guests to these ceremonies are almost always present the representatives of the political parties as well as clergy, often the representatives of public and political life from Hungary are invited. The important moment is the appearance of the Slovak inscriptions, that is of the bilingualism, as well as appearance of national sign of Slovak republic. The habit of building of carved

memorial poles retroactively influenced the building of gravestone memorials, steles. They appear in many places and more and more often in the cemeteries, and not only in the Protestant circles, yet also in Catholic ones that want to express markedly their fellowship to the Hungarian ethnic minority.

The number of carved memorial poles is still increasing, and the occasions where several poles can be found are not rare. According to so called “board law” /in Slovak „tabuľový zákon“/ that was accepted in 1993 in Slovakia, if non-Slovak minority population in certain location exceeds 20 percent, boards marking the names of towns must be also inscribed in the language of the particular minority. This way, if somebody travels the south of Slovakia, these boards will schematically mark the locations populated by Hungarian minority. Yet, if on the map of Slovakia we mark more than 200 registered carved memorial poles, with their help nowadays the frontiers of area populated by Hungarian minority ethnic group can be precisely depicted.