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ARTICLE

A Graveyard as a Home to Ghosts or a Subject of Scholarly Research? The Czech National Cemetery at Vyšehrad

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ABSTRACT

Confirmed by a variety of sociological research, modern Czech society is considered deeply secular, non-believing, rejecting religious institutions and traditional forms of religion. This paper focuses on a field study of religiosity, namely on funeral artifacts in Vyšehrad, the Czech national cemetery in Prague, the Czech Republic's capital. Based on the findings of ethnographer Wilbur Zelinsky, the paper assumes that gravestones in particular record very private, innermost feelings, messages, tidings, and personal values, which can provide us with important knowledge about (especially) the bereaved persons' attitudes to human ultimate things including religious issues in the moments of a great loss of a loved one, i.e. in the situation of so-called existential crisis. The aim of the paper is to answer two key questions: firstly, how religion (or non-belief) is presented in the Czech national cemetery and secondly, to what degree is the gravestones' character influenced by significant historical events of modern Czech history. In other words, how much the image of religion in this nationally important cemetery corresponds with the degree of religiosity researched by standard sociological means.

KEYWORDS

funerary religiosity, national cemetery, Czechness, national identity, Vyšehrad, non-religion

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Introduction

A secular and unbelieving character, latent anticlericalism, apathy and indifference concerning religious questions and even atheism are all positions, which have been linked in recent decades with the Czech Republic as well as with Estonia within the framework of European society (Bubík, Remmel, & Václavík, 2020). Contemporary research confirms that religion is not an important theme for Czech society and is much less visible in public life than is the case, for example, in the neighbouring countries like Poland, Slovakia and Hungary (Máté-Tóth, 2019), that is in countries with a similar historical and cultural experience. There is nevertheless a need to distinguish within the positions of the Czech population between the relationship to religion and the relationship to churches, that is between the institutionalized form of religion and personal faith, religiosity. In this context we define religion in Durkheim's sense as unified system of beliefs and practices uniting believers into one community (Durkheim, 1912/2003, p. 65), whereas religiosity is a personal expression of faith that is not necessarily tied with it.

A number of specialized studies dealing with the decline in the importance of religion in Czech society are usually based on sociological studies, and they reveal much of importance (Hamplová, 2013; Horák, 2015; Lužný, 1999; Nešpor, 2010; Václavík, 2009). This is first and foremost a significant decline in trust in religious institutions, rejecting traditional faith, loss of religious identity, as well as civic awareness of the importance of protecting one's own privacy, in particular, when it comes to questions which are viewed as personal including the relationship to religion. It is nevertheless specifically this fact, the possibility of not answering questions about religious perception (for example, when carrying out a census), which significantly limits sociological inquiry (Fialová & Nešpor, 2018, p. 210; Havlíček, 2019). Although it has been clearly demonstrated that the number of people identifying with traditional religious perception has markedly decreased in the Czech Republic in recent decades, this does not necessarily mean that the number of non-believers or even atheists is growing. Whatever the case, the set of so-called "religiously unaffiliated" significantly complicates a scientific view of the actual level of secularization of Czech society. Specifically, these circumstances can markedly relativize the specialized and lay claims that contemporary Czechs rank among the least religious nations at present.

This study attempts to take another approach. It is based on the conviction that science needs to focus attention primarily on research into so-called small and narrowly focused issues. Contemporary society is extremely different in terms of ideology and values, and social science continues to succumb to the temptation to produce extremely general claims, for example, in connection with the character and level of religiosity or secularity. The author of this study is therefore putting forward the markedly more modest aim, this being to contribute to the study of one of the most important segments of material culture, these being cemeteries as locations with a cultural memory. This study specifically focuses on the Vyšehrad cemetery in Prague, which is specific in that it has been viewed as the Czech national cemetery from as far back as the nineteenth century (Gade, 2015).

This study is influenced by an emphasis on "a grounded theoretical and inductive approach to religion in locality" propagated by the Religious Studies scholar Kim Knott, according to whom the religious and non-religious are situated in the structure of the seeming secular world together. These do not therefore consist of two spheres of reality, which are distinctly separate, but which actually interlink with one another. The author of this study does not therefore share the traditional concept of "the holy and the profane" as ambivalent realities, but is of the opinion that specifically public space, in our case the cemetery, appropriately manifest these two categories.

The role of the body is also essential in the framework of the study of religiosity in public space, which in our case will consist of a body (bodies), which is dehumanized. The method of placement of the body into a space actually constructs social reality, thereby giving (the body) a truly specific symbolism (Knott, 2005), which can play an important role, for example, in the framework of religious, cultural, historical or political narrative, which they can even mutually link. The body and space will be therefore key components of this study, by means of which we can try to explain not only the processual changes in relationship to death among the Czech intelligentsia, but also their relationship to religion.

The Study of Funerary Religiosity

Research into cemetery artefacts of the Vyšehrad cemetery follows one essential aim, thus being a contribution to understanding so-called "funerary religiosity" (Zelinsky, 2007, p. 453), as we are of the opinion that this type of religiosity is not only neglected, but is also an important component of the study of religiosity as such.

Although the fact that exploring something such as "funerary religiosity" can sound somewhat strange, it is important to emphasize that this primarily concerns the religiosity of the bereaved, which is manifested first and foremost in the formation of the gravestones of the close deceased and in adaptations to grave sites. The ethnographer Wilbur Zelinsky, for example, is convinced that gravestones in particular are artefacts expressing extremely internal feelings, messages and a mission, personal values and that "the testimony of cemeteries is some kind of final letter to the world" (Zelinsky, 2007, pp. 446–447). Laura Suchan is also of the opinion that "gravestones are more than just memorials to the deceased" (Suchan, 2008, p. 41). It is important in her view to view gravestones and cemeteries differently than merely from the perspective of genealogy. This consists, that is, of a form of expression, which is able to provide insight into the social history of the given society and thus "convey messages about religion" (Suchan, 2008, pp. 41–43, 45). In other words, research into cemeteries can provide us with important knowledge about local history, period literature, architecture, art and about religion (Mitoraj, 2001, pp. 82–87), or generally said about "mortuary ideology" and its conditioning to religious, social, historical, cultural and economic factors (Gorman & DiBlasi, 1981, p. 79).

While the work up until now focused on research into graveyards has been focused on the denominational affiliation of the deceased, the localization of graveyard motifs in various geographical areas, the diversity of iconography, the

change in gravestone motifs, etc., specifically Zelinsky's research is unique in that it is focused on research into funerary religiosity in connection with the study of the level of secularization. This is based on the fact that the bereaved confronted with the reality of death and mortality, along with the name, date of birth and date of death freely place on gravestones symbols and inscriptions, which correspond with their personal values and convictions. This therefore consists of an extremely sensible form of religiosity, which needs to receive deserved attention even in religious research (Zelinsky, 2007, p. 453), and this specifically because it does not have always to correspond with a publicly declared religiosity, can be coordinated or supplemented.

Zelinsky's working hypothesis is the assumption, which I also support in this study, that there is a close relationship between "deep down personal religiosity and its funerary expression" (Zelinsky, 2007, p. 457). In other words, a person who experiences his faith personally, also expresses it in this manner. The submitted study therefore attempts to make use of this theoretical assumption[1]. One of its main goals is to therefore capture the changes in the attitudes of the Czech intelligentsia to religion in time, along with the onset, character and changes to secular thinking.

The research was focused on one concrete cemetery, which is unique in the Czech environment. Vyšehrad or also the Slavín cemetery at the church (basilica from the year 2003) of St. Peter and St. Paul in Vyšehrad in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, is a locale where a number of renowned Czech personages are buried, including their families. Originally, however, only Catholic Christians were buried in this cemetery, and its western part serves as a burial ground for higher ecclesiastical dignitaries, priests, clergymen and nuns.

The reasons behind the selection of this cemetery were several. The first of them is the fact that this cemetery in particular is the modern Czech burying ground for a range of personages who contributed significantly to the building of Czech national consciousness and the development of Czech society. Secondly, these people are perceived historically as models and examples of modern Czechness. Thirdly, there is the assumption that specifically the gravestones of these personages can help us understand the transformations on the relationship of Czech society to religion.

It is also assumed that the graveyard space, in the same manner as "funerary religiosity" in Bohemia, underwent changes as of the nineteenth century which are linked with important ideological and also political milestones of Czech history, that is:

1) the period after the year 1848 when transformations to the absolutist system of the Austrian Empire came about, which the Czech Lands were part of;
2) developments after the year 1918, which are linked with the emergence of an independent Czechoslovakia and the democratization of society;
3) the events after the year 1945, when World War II came to an end and essential changes in the national composition occurred (the expulsion of one third of the population) in post-war Czechoslovakia;

[1] Zelinsky compares a large amount of data obtained from gravestones in the United States, Canada and Great Britain. The greatest surprise of this research is the fact that the level of British and Canadian religiosity recorded on gravestones is permanent and far greater than the American value, even though the United States is generally viewed as an extremely religious society.

4) the events after the year 1948, when the Communist regime came to power and the national establishment of atheism;
5) changes after the year 1989, which are linked with the fall of Communism, the gradual renewal of democratic society, its differentiation, pluralization, and also marked by great consumerism.

In other words, this paper presents the research into "the temporal patterning" (Gorman & DiBlasi, 1981, p. 81) of the content of the gravestones of Vyšehrad cemetery and what these gravestones can tell us in a time perspective about attitudes to death, to the nation, to the country and to religion, that is how so-called "mortuary ideology" changed over time, in the key historical stages, which Czech society went through in the modern age.

In light of the above-mentioned, there will be an attempt to answer two key questions:

1) how and to what extent religion is represented at the Czech national cemetery – with the assumption that if this cemetery is a national symbol characterizing modern Czechness, then this cultural icon should correspond roughly to the attitudes of Czech society to religion in the modern age;
2) whether and to what extent the so-called final letters to the world of this cemetery are influenced by the significant historical events, which Czech society underwent in its modern history.

In contrast to Zelinsky, I am of the opinion that gravestone messages, despite being direct and often of an internal character, are therefore conditioned by an ideological fixation, that is the spirit of the time and key historical events.

The Idea of the National Cemetery in Prague

The history of Europe as well as of the Czech Lands relate of several key characteristics, which local cemeteries are marked by. So-called "mortuary ideology", corresponding to established Christian tradition and its traditions concerning the character of burial and treatment of remains (of the body) of the deceased, has penetrated deep into social awareness and the legal principles of the particular European countries in existence at present.

The traditional character of this "ideology" is based on biblical teachings about the body and physicality, the main idea of which is that the body was created by God and will one-day rise from the dead. The Christian concept views death as a transition, which corresponds to the traditional emphasis on a respectable treatment of the body, including the placement of the remains in a chosen piety locale, this being a graveyard. Over the course of centuries, a truly thorough manual of burial rituals came about, a prayer practice for the deceased, including so-called commemorative day for the deceased entitled "All Souls' Day". Visiting a cemetery, at least on the day of the anniversary of a birth or death of a deceased person, belongs to the unwritten rules, a publicly respected form of piety. Emotional respect for a close deceased person is thus a truly natural form of behaviour.

With transformations in the area of religious faith in Europe, which arise primarily in the Reformation, changes also come about in the understanding of

mortuary ideology, the relationship to the body including attitudes toward death[2], which culminates in the modern era in a requirement for a secular burial and with the right to engage with one's own body (for example, in the form of the so-called cremation movement). According to Olga Nešporová, "the perception changed as to what behaviour is considered pious (in burial practice), and this in the sense of much greater tolerance for various kinds of treatment" in recent decades (Nešporová, 2013, p. 234). It has also become apparent that Christian symbolism is retreating to the background and that new parts of cemeteries in the Czech Republic not only do not make use of Christian symbolism, but do not use anything else instead (Nešporová, 2013, pp. 237–238). It is therefore clear that a marked change in traditional funeral practice, the customs connected with it, in particular those which are based on Christian attitudes to death, is coming about in contemporary Czech society.

5522 cemeteries and 266 private graveyards were listed in the Czech Republic in the year 2006 (Eliáš & Kotrlý, 2006). Vyšehrad cemetery in Prague, which is the central locality for the present research, is a piety location, where burials took place, according to archaeological findings from as far back as the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Nechvátal, 1991, p. 5). A small graveyard emerged here over the course of time, where burials only took place occasionally (Bedrníček, 2008, p. 4). The idea of building a national cemetery specifically at this spot emerged in the 1860s as part of the newly established association of Czech writers under the name *Svatobor*, the members of which were renowned personages from the ranks of Czech cultural and business life, with the extremely renowned historian František Palacký at the forefront (Potoček, 2005, p. 16). A number of nationalist focused Catholic priests and later even Tomáš G. Masaryk, the first President of democratic Czechoslovakia from the years 1918 up to 1935 and also his successor in the presidential office Edvard Beneš, were involved in it.

The motto of the association was: *Pomáhej! Osvěcuj! Pamatuj!* (*Help! Enlighten! Remember!*). The aim was to support financially Czech writing[3], in particular impoverished writers, their families and the bereaved as a central element of the national revival and also, which is significant for our purposes, "the celebration of their memory" (Liška, 2006, p. 11). Help was provided also by means of prizes, scholarships or rewards, which was supposed to develop their further creative work, although this did not consist of only support for literary works, but also scientific work or historical (Potoček, 2005, pp. 342–344). There was also a focus on publishing important works written in Czech, the building of monuments, gravestones and memorial plaques at places of reverence, which contributed in a significant manner to the development

[2] Philipe Ariés (1977, 1983) distinguishes between the old and the modern approach to death, which are perceived as clearly contradictory. The modern period and man, in contrast to the so-called old approach, do not in his view know how to deal with death and attempts to eliminate it from life. He distinguishes in this sense between the "sauvage' and "domestiquée" approach to death.

[3] Literature was viewed as the most important source for national life and the national language, even being viewed as "a holy thing", as mentioned in *Ohlášení* (*Announcement*) by Svatobor, which was printed in *Národní listy* ("The National Newspaper") (1862, no. 89). The authors of this text included František Palacký and Jan E. Purkyně.

of national writing and culture, and this not only in the Czech Lands, but also abroad (Potoček, 2005, p. 342).

The actual association Svatobor came about in the year 1862, this being a time when the Czech Lands were still a part of the Hapsburg monarchy (from the years 1526 to 1918). The political situation in the monarchy, after the revolutionary year of 1848[4], was liberalized somewhat, leading to more open propagation of national consciousness and patriotism. This led to the idea of founding the national cemetery in an appropriate locality. After a certain period of weighing various possibilities, the choice was made for a locale, which had been the seat of Czech political power in the past; it was also the burial site of the first Czech King Vratislaus I (888–921), from the Czech royal Přemyslid dynasty, which ruled the Přemyslid state from this locale (Nechvátal, 1991, p. 7). Vyšehrad was an ancient Slavic fortress "linked with mythical legends from the oldest national past". It was viewed in the modern age as "the historical picture of Czech life" (Balák, 1946, p. 8). A number of renowned personages had been buried here from the time of the establishment of the national cemetery, including the poet Karel Hynek Mácha (1810–1836), the writer Božena Němcová (1820–1862), the composers Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884) and Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904), the painter Mikoláš Aleš (1852–1913), the writer Karel Čapek (1890–1938) and a range of others.

According to the founders of the association, the true greatness of the nation was to be embodied not only in care for its own history and language, but also in care for "the sons of the nation", and this not during their lives, but also after their deaths. The national cemetery is therefore a graveyard where Czechs are buried not in accordance with their religious allegiance or piety, but in accordance with their loyalty to the language and to the nation. In relation to the study of mortuary ideology, this cemetery is therefore a truly suitable locality. It helped to create the story of Czechness, which contributed to the formation of national identity, and also reflects the Czech national character.

Slavín Tomb as a Czech Pantheon

The memory of a nation is undoubtedly conditioned by the level of education, the character of the political system, technological development or the ruling ideology. The life stories of renowned persons therefore only have a time-limited length in the framework of the national memory. Some of them can even be completely intentionally forgotten, and others, in contrast, recalled. Awareness of the societal-wide importance of particular people is not only a generational, but a personal (for example, an intellectual) issue, and this is also the case with the individuals buried at the Vyšehrad cemetery, where among the more than 600 buried only a few are still part of current-day general awareness (a number of the buried are, however, their relations).

The idea of transforming Vyšehrad cemetery into a national graveyard came about, however, gradually (Nechvátal, 1991, pp. 8–11). The first separate, so-called national

[4] The year 1848 is primarily linked in the Hapsburg Monarchy with the struggle of Hungarians for freedom and independence, which helped other nations or ethnic groups in the monarchy with their efforts.

graves were established with the aim of burying Czech writers. We therefore read of one of the newly built graves: "Nations cannot disappear if their language is alive"[5]. The maturity of a nation was supposed to consist of the maturity of the language and its writing. Apart from language, there was also an emphasis on, for example, the idea of the country or nation, but language was viewed as the main element for forming continuity of national awareness, national identity and national distinctiveness. It is not therefore the territory, bloodline or religion, but the language allegiance, which is of the greatest importance for self-definition in the modern concept of Czechness; it was defined in the nineteenth century in confrontation with Germanness and the German language as well as in relation to Austrian absolutism and the Austrian form of Catholicism or Austro-Catholicism.

Another idea emerged in the 1880s in connection with discussion about the character of a cemetery, thus being the establishment of a shared honorary tomb. This was not, however, accepted unanimously, with resistance even among the Czech intelligentsia (Nekula, 2017, pp. 389–390). This was supposed to consist of a so-called Czech "Pantheon", a kind of "temple of humanity", as is written on its epitaph. The tomb was finally built and named Slavín (Figure 1). It has been situated in the eastern part of Vyšehrad cemetery from the year 1893[6]. The first to be buried there was the renowned poet Julius Zeyer in the year 1901, this being eight years after the completion of the tomb. The last to be buried there was the conductor Rafael Kubelík in the year 1996. The personage of the poet Zeyer, as the first to be buried, was supposed to imply "the Christological and national narrative", and specifically his burial at Vyšehrad cemetery became "a visible symbol of Czechness" not only for Czechs, but also for Prague Germans, as it became a symbol of the nationally divided Prague (Nekula, 2017, p. 389), in the same fashion as in the Czech Lands.

Figure 1. *Slavín tomb*

The tomb was built at the end of the nineteenth century, still during the period of Austria-Hungary. The Habsburgs, over the period of the three-hundred-year empire, was responsible in particular for the forced recatholization of the inhabitants of the Czech Lands, this involving the eradication of Protestantism and also supporting the privileged position of German and German speakers and the confession of the Catholic population. From the time of the Imperial Patent of Toleration from the year 1781, the constitution guaranteed complete freedom of confession for

[5] This was a motto by the Czech writer, national patriot and Slavist Václav Hanka (1791–1861).

[6] Slavín tomb was built in the year 1893. The first to be buried there was the poet Julius Zeyer.

even non-Catholics; however, within the Protestant confession only Lutherans and Helvetian Calvinists were allowed, these being non-Czech denominations. Czech and Brethren confessions were not allowed. Modern Protestantism finally built upon these concepts, but only after the year 1918. These two Protestant confessions, the Helvetian and the Lutheran, were extremely small in terms of numbers in the Czech Lands, thus being a result of the forced recatholization. Protestants thus became a minority confession in the Czech Lands, which currently consists of half of a percent of the population. Religious identity of the nineteenth century that is at the time of building national identity was primarily Catholic. It is therefore not surprising that specifically church Catholic symbolism played an important role in the symbolic and aesthetic creation of the national Slavín tomb.

55 people were buried in this tomb over the course of more than one hundred years. The greatest number consisted of poets and writers (12), followed by actors (7), opera singers (6), painters (5), sculptors (5), architects (4), violinists (3), pianists (2), conductors and composers (2), directors (2), philologists (2), historians (2), archaeologists (1), literary historians (1), theatre critics (1), inventors (1) and economists (1).

The tomb consists of a crypt, a catafalque with a cross and a monument with a sarcophagus, which are linked by a balustrade stairway. The tomb is covered by the gravestones of the persons buried there. They are simple and list, with one exception, only the birth-date and date of death. The cross as a traditional cultural burial symbol depicts the crucified Christ, with a stone table underneath upon which the remains of the deceased are placed during funerals before being placed into the tomb (Liška, 2006, p. 21). An inscription is on the table in the form of a verse from the New Testament from the Gospel of John 11:25: *"Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"*. A monument rises behind the cross in the form of a stylobate, upon the top of which is an allegorical figure of so-called the Genius of the Nation with wings seated on the sarcophagus. An inscription is placed under the sarcophagus, which is also the motto of Slavín: *"Although having died, they still speak"*. Another two sculptures representing the nation are situated in the lower part of the sarcophagus. The first of them depicts "The mourning nation" with the inscription *"His great sons now dust – the nation mourns, returning to earth"*, the second "The nation rejoices" with the inscription *"Their deeds, rejoicing, celebrate for humanity for ages"* (Liška, 2006, 21).

The tomb is dominated by four figures, with two of them being most prominent – the person of the crucified Christ and the figure of the Genius of the Nation, which is reminiscent of an angel because of its wings. The symbol of the cross of Christ is understood in Christian culture as a symbol of suffering, death and crucifixion and victory over death in the form of resurrection. Christian culture does not view suffering as an end in itself, but attributes it with a deep meaning; just as death does not represent a definitive end, but a transition, a hope for a new eternal life. The excerpt from the Gospel of John thus makes reference to the importance of faith as a condition for future life, which expires without faith, in the same manner as a nation without a language.

The character of a national tomb links the Christian symbolism of a cross with the symbolism of the nation as a place for a life which is ours, which we own and from which we arose. The nation is a place where a person is born and dies; it takes care of life and death, which is shared with others; it is both the birthplace of ordinary people as well as remarkable ones, geniuses. The central figure of the Genius of the Nation, as well as the words placed on the inscriptions located on the monument, such as "genius", "nation" or "land" are linked into one whole thanks to the arrangement of the space of the monument; but one cannot not notice that the symbolism of the Christian cross is only a kind of transition or transitional level to something else, something higher, which can also be symbolized by the stairs of the balustrade, which lead from the cross to the actual monument. From the spatial perspective, the Christian cross in Slavín does not stand out, but in comparison with the character of the monument of the nation finds itself in its shadow. The memorial with the cross is significantly smaller than the monument with the sculpture of the Genius of the Nation placed on the top. The proportionality of both sculptures is thus diametrically different. The expression of the tortured Christ also comes across as passive and, in this respect, both monuments are contrasting in expression. The majesty of the Genius of the Nation has wings, which manifest freedom, power and strength and which are as if in contradiction with the helpless position of Jesus on the cross. The sculpture of Genius also evokes the expression of a caring being, bending down over the coffin of the deceased son of the nation, and seeming to be preparing to breathe new life into him, while in contrast the sculpture of Christ seems to loom in isolation in the space.

The Slavín tomb thus makes the strong impression that traditional religious identity and Christ as a model followed (still ongoing) in the Christian type of society are only a symbolic expression of a transition to a new, earthly and humanly focused ideal. At the same time, the process of social and cultural development begins to be understood in an environment of nationalists and intellectuals as a path to Humanism, which leads from religion to a nation, from the Church to a country, from the following of Christ to the following of great personages of a nation, their great ideals.

The philosopher Ladislav Kunte (1874–1945) truly distinctly captured the spirit of the day, which corresponds with our theme, when he wrote in the 1920s that modern man is not only losing faith in life after death, but that "life and the world as it is today has become the starting point and goal of the new faith" (Kunte, 1920, p. 27). He at the same time realises that the nation for the Czech patriot is "a being of its kind, which through something great, living, demanding respect, honour, devotion, sacrifice – a deity of its own kind, and everything which links one to a nation evokes mystical respect: the language of a nation, its history, a historical locale, historical personages, days" (Kunte, 1920, pp. 94–95). Even the patriotic phraseology has, in his view, a religious character, when he speaks of the responsibility to love the nation and the country, about sacrifices for the nation, about the altar of the nation and so on (Ibid.). It is therefore apparent that the national tomb reveals that the importance of Christianity was receding among the Czech intelligentsia in the nineteenth century in favour of period nationalism and preparing a new path, an earthly one and most importantly one focused on human ideals.

The Gravestone Symbolism of the Vyšehrad Cemetery

Several important facts need to be kept in mind when studying national symbolism. First of all, the erection of the gravestones usually did not correspond in terms of time with the date of the death of the personages. In addition, various changes involving repairs, adaptations, overall reconstruction or even the selling of a grave spot could come about over the course of time. When studying this issue, we also became aware of the fact that a certain level of symbolic, aesthetic and cultural conservatism exists in the question of the character of the gravestones. Their selection was thus influenced not only by the personal taste of the bereaved, but also by period fashion and local customs.

The Christian cross ranks among the most traditional symbols to be placed on the graves of the deceased in Western culture generally, along with in the Czech Lands. This is also the case at the Vyšehrad cemetery, where the symbol of the cross (Figure 2) is not only part of the Slavín tomb, but also predominates as a symbol in the architecture of the entire cemetery. If one were to briefly contemplate the meaning of a traditional symbol like the cross, one should emphasize that it consists of a symbol of a geometric shape, which consists of two pieces overlaying each other at a right angle. The actual word ("cross": from the Latin "crux") originally meant an instrument of torture, used by a range of ancient nations for executing criminals. Jesus of Nazareth was also killed on a cross, as a result of which the cross became the main symbol of this religion and consequently even Christian graves.

Figure 2. *Symbol of a cross*

Apart from Christian crosses, there are also various depictions of the face of Jesus on the gravestones in the cemetery, usually with an anguished expression, with the crown of thorns which was supposedly placed on the head of Jesus during the crucifixion. The motif of the lamb of God as a sacrificial animal also appears in one case on a gravestone, this being a symbolic depiction of the sacrificed Jesus. A christogram was also used on several gravestones, with this ranking among the oldest Christian symbols, even being used on the gravestones of Christians back in Classical times. This consists of the first two letters referring to the name of Jesus in Greek, that is the Greek letters "X" and "P" (read together as Chi-Rho), when the letters are written after each other. Apart from these Greek letters from the alphabet, there are also its first and last letter, that is "A" and "Ω", which indicate the beginning and the end, birth and death, which refer in Christian theology to the fact that God

is the origin of everything and where everything returns, that is even the bodies of the deceased.

The mother of Jesus, Mary, who is viewed as the mother of the Catholic Church, is also depicted on several gravestones. The Catholic Church is comprehended as the Madonna protector, who cares for the souls of the deceased in a special manner and intercedes for their salvation. She is sometimes even portrayed with the infant Jesus or also with the crucified Christ in the form of piety (Figure 3). Finally, there are figures of angels, spiritual beings in human form with wings. The Bible perceives them as messengers of God, who link the eternal world with the earthly one and who are also viewed as protectors of the bodies, whose souls have departed.

Figure 3. *Gravestone in the form of piety*

All of these presented symbols are traditional signs of Christian identity and its mortuary ideology, and do not differ from established views as to what a usual Christian tomb should look like. They consist of symbols, which are personal and which can be viewed as a so-called final letter to the world, but also as a letter fully corresponding with the cultural dominance of the Catholic church in society. Life in this cemetery over the last 150 years is therefore evidence of the fact that Christian discourse and its mortuary ideology is still deeply rooted in Czech society.

When we speak of the Vyšehrad cemetery as a national graveyard, we have to keep in mind that this consists of a cemetery, which was originally Catholic. This serves to explain why there are no gravestones with Protestant gravestone symbols in the national cemetery, such as the chalice or the Bible, despite the fact that Protestantism in the Czech Lands is among the most important religious traditions of a dynamic society from as far back as the high Middle Ages. The symbolic grave (a so-called cenotaph built in the year 2000) of Dr. Milada Horáková (she was a member of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren), who was a victim of a judicial murder at the time of the rise of the Communist regime and was publicly executed in 1950, is located at the cemetery, but the symbolism of the grave is political emphasizing the heroic position taken against the despotism of the Communist party.

Seemingly, for the same reason, due to this being originally a Catholic cemetery, the national cemetery is missing any Jewish grave symbols, such as blessing hands, a pot or the Star of David. A number of Jews identified historically with the German culture and language, but also with the Czech culture after the establishment of Czechoslovakia in the year 1918. These Czech Jews usually came from the circle of so-called assimilants, many of whom, however, were either murdered during World War Two or emigrated prior to the War. The renowned Prague Jews included, for example, Franz Kafka (1883–1924), who is buried in Prague, but not at Vyšehrad cemetery. The reason for this could also be the fact that he wrote in German.

When it comes to depictions of secular gravestones, the approaches are quite rich in variety and make up a significant part of this cemetery. A number of the graves in the Vyšehrad cemetery are of a secular character and do not have any religious symbolism. The most frequent depictions are busts of the deceased personages, sometimes of larger than life size. This type of gravestone is therefore linked to a concrete deceased person, who is artistically rendered, often without any other secular symbols, which would indicate the position of the deceased or his or her family to death or to religion. The personality of the deceased is emphasized, his or her human dimension and skills, thanks to which the person became known. Gravestones in the form of a bust were most frequently built during the period of the Communist regime. This emphasis on individuality and the importance of the personage did not, however, actually correspond with the collective concept of Communist society, which rejected and openly criticized the cult of the personality as of the 1950s. These gravestones actually served to evoke this impression.

Additional secular expressions of interest include, first and foremost, engravings of the personal autographs of the deceased, these being artistically stylized figures, most frequently women, as well as various musical instruments (guitar, violin, harp) or other objects, which are connected with the deceased (hands, football, ball), with even symbols of the scouting movement in several cases. A number of gravestones have both religious and secular symbols at the same time.

One interesting discovery is that Christian motifs continued to be used for decorating gravestones during the forty-year period of the Communist regime. Also, of interest is that no gravestones have been preserved with typical Communist symbols such as the sickle, hammer or red star from the same period. There are none of them in the cemetery at this time. Even the gravestones of renowned figures of the Communist regime, such as the poet and writer Vítězslav Nezval (Figure 4) or the historian

Figure 4. *Grave of the Communist poet Vítězslav Nezval*

and celebrated Communist politician Zdeněk Nejedlý, do not contain any Communist symbolism, or any other. The question therefore arises as to why certain renowned Communists were buried specifically here in this cemetery, when the Communist regime advocated an international, that is a non-national, policy.

Epitaphs as Messages to the Future

It has already been mentioned that gravestones are understood here as bearers of reports, messages, which are designated, first and foremost, for future generations. They are expressions from the bereaved, usually related to the deceased person, but also expressing values, desires and convictions in order to communicate something completely personal. It is apparent that in existential situations, as in the case of the death of someone close, personal convictions appear more often and more open than is the case, with so-called ordinary life moments. I therefore attempt here to capture the content of this communication and place it into the period and cultural contexts.

A chronological perspective can be very helpful in order to understand the transformations of mortuary ideology. Gravestones and their inscriptions, if we were to arrange them from the oldest to the most current, can indicate transformations over time and their possible connection to the character of the day and our formulated key historical events.

To create a time axis, I chose as the criteria *the date of the death of the first person* listed on the gravestone, and this as the approximate period for the erection of the gravestone. I should emphasize that this only consists of "a framework chronology". I am aware, of course, of the fact that the time period of the erection of the gravestone often did not correspond with the year of the death of the personage and that gravestones were often built somewhat later. In addition, gravestones could be changed, altered or rebuilt completely new over time[7]. Despite the fact that the exact time of the final adaptation to the gravestone cannot be verified, I finally did not resign on this criteria, as I am of the opinion that thanks to this we can at least approximately determine the time of its creation. In light of this fact, I will only attribute a corresponding weight to the conclusions.

Christian symbolism, if we leave out at this time the Slavín tomb and the part of the cemetery where Catholic clergy are buried, is present in more than half of the overall number of 46 inscriptions. The most frequent themes are references to God, the Lord, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the idea of eternal truth, the theme of resurrection from the dead, the Final Judgement or the awareness that man comes from the dust of the earth. The following can be seen as an example of this theme: *"Beatified be the deceased who die with the Lord"* (year 1887), or the introductory words of the hymn Hail Mary in the Latin version: *"Ave Maria, gratia plena"* (year 1892), *"His soul lives with God"* (year 1940), *"Thy will be done"* (year 1949) or the New Testament verse

[7] The administration of the Vyšehrad cemetery is not managed by any archive, which would contain information about the period of the building of the tombs or their consequent adaptations. There was not a requirement for the approval of the administration of the cemetery for building structures (repairs) of grave equipment at the cemetery in the nineteenth or even in the twentieth century, as is there is at present.

from the Gospel of John *"Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"* (year 1954). These therefore consisted of standard religious texts, which fully correspond with mortuary ideology and which are an expression of a personal, Church conceived piety. It is of interest that this traditional form did not even become significantly less frequent in the first decades after the Communist takeover (1948), which was accompanied by persecution of the Church and denigration of religious faith in society.

Epitaphs from the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, in contrast, thematise the idea of the country and the nation, these themes having become extremely important and powerfully resonating within society. This is also attested to by particular examples: *"If and when God gives you life, be loyal to your nation and faithful to your friends"* (year 1869) or *"My nation is my motto"* (year 1888), *"If only the misfortune of my nation could join me in one grave"* (year 1890), *"I wish my nation from all my heart that it would never descend into small-mindedness or ascend into arrogance"* (year 1895) or *"He went out into the world to seek truth in his great longing, fighting for the rights of his nation, rest in the arms of eternal truth"* (year 1917). These inscriptions indicate, however, an already unclear link between the idea of the nation and religion. Additionally, it seems as if the theme of the nation is gradually dwindling, which could have been the result of the gaining of national independence in the year 1918, with the founding of Czechoslovakia.

Apart from Christian, patriotic and nationalist themes, there are a number of inscriptions on the gravestones also emphasizing the themes of futility, fate and the transience of human life (for example, *"Where are those times, where is that time"*; year 1962), the cycle of life (*"The tree of knowledge is in sudden sorrow, what time has taken, it will also give"*; year 2011), sorrow from the loss of a loved one, the importance of internal experience of reality, the seeking of truth within the human or in contrast the importance of seeking out oneself in nature (*"We only find ourselves in nature"*; year 1922). They further celebrate family, marital and filial love (*"I love you to the skies, Mother"*; year 2004), as well as promoting the importance of faith, loyalty, justice or a life lived in devotion to music and art. These consist therefore of expressions of internal human feelings and basic values, which are not conditioned by period mortuary ideology or by important historical events, which occurred in Czech society. They are expessions, which could be labelled as eidetic, as they express pure personal feelings which are a result of the loss of a loved one. These inscriptions in particular, as letters to the future generation, can be viewed as "secular humanist".

The Non-Religious Character of the Tombs

Gravestones and their symbolism are conditioned not only by the ideological beliefs of the deceased and their families, the traditional forms of their formation, the funeral mode, but also the economic possibilities of the bereaved. It is therefore assumed that the greater the originality of the gravestone, the larger the financial costs connected with its realization. In addition, these kinds of gravestones have a greater informative value than those which are simple and basic. Originality of gravestones, which we

comprehend in the sense "of an unconventional design", is also more typical among the intelligentsia and the more prosperous layer of society, among artists, and also with those deceased whose gravestones were financed from public resources. In other words, a higher economic status on the part of the bereaved makes possible a more distinct, that is a more original expression, this being the bearer of a richer informative message.

While the gravestones situated on the national Slavín tomb (with the exception of the tomb itself) are simple and only have a basic message about the deceased, that is the date of birth and death, a number of additional gravestones in the Vyšehrad cemetery are extremely varied in terms of their content and execution, often truly atypical and interesting artistically. The gravestones of actors, artists and athletes rank among the most original. I have chosen as examples the gravestones of personages who died after the year 1989, that is after the fall of Communism so as to be able to attempt to capture the character of the time period. These gravestones are executed, not only in an original manner, but a number of them also have a religious character. It is therefore assumed that their content will correspond to the freedom of the time and independent expression in questions, which concern the final affairs of individuals.

It is apparent that the originality of gravestones is more frequent with actors or artists than with other professions. One of them, for example, is the gravestone of the actor Antonín Jedlička (1923–1993) with the artistic pseudonym "Uncle Jedlička". This actor was primarily known for establishing a theatre focused on children, "who were introduced to theatre in the form of play" (Potoček, 2005, p. 101). He also worked as a sound imitator (he was able to imitate hundreds of different sounds) in the radio and television and also wrote books for small children (Ibid.). The gravestone is specific in terms of the fact that the only symbol which it contains is a (simple) symbol of a fir as a tree. This is located in the place where usually the symbol of a cross is placed on graves. The symbol of the tree was chosen because the name of this actor in Czech consists of a diminutive of the word for a fir tree, that is jedlička (in English "little fir-tree"). The gravestone also contains his artistic name, which was primarily known by his child audience, that is "Strýček Jedlička" (in English "Uncle Fir-Tree"). The gravestone does not make any reference to any post-humous content, but instead recalls the artistic role of this actor, in particular the role of the good uncle, who is kind-hearted, merry, friendly and who even has a sense of humour even after the graves, which is confirmed by the symbolic tree on his gravestone.

Another original gravestone from the present is that of the actor Radoslav Brzobohatý (1932–2012), who was known as both a theatre and film actor and who was famous as a young man on the big screen, not only for his acting talent, but also for his manliness. His name is engraved on the gravestone, his own signature and also an excerpt from the song *"Moravia, Moravia! dear Moravia, what comes from you, noble band"*. This consists of a nationalist song apparently from the time of the Napoleonic (French-Austrian) Wars which took place in the Czech (Moravian) territory. This song is sometimes even viewed as the unofficial Moravian anthem. The song has more verses, some of which emphasize, for example, an anti-French, others an anti-German character, etc. The reason for the placement on the gravestone is in all

probability the fact that the actor had a deep affection for Moravia and Wallachia (the eastern part of the Czech Republic) where he was born. Although he spent most of life in Prague, he was a Moravian patriot, and also truly loved Moravian folk songs. His gravestone, similarly as in the case of the actor Jedlička, did not contain any religious motifs, but was intended to recall two things. The first is the personality of the actor, which is supposed to be captured by the engraving of his signature as well as the engraving of his portrait. The second, his deeply personal relationship to his native land, is his birthplace. The words of the song therefore emphasize the nobility of the personages who came from this region. The gravestone does not contain any information about his profession, but does recall his human character and relation to his homeland.

The gravestones of the Czech football players Josef Bican (1913–2001) and Josef Masopust (1931–2015), who were icons of Czech football in the twentieth century, are also original. Bican is even considered one of the greatest Czech football players of all time. He first played for Rapid Vienna and later for Slavia Prague. He was the leading scorer, not only in the Austrian, but also in the Czech football league. Josef Masopust, in contrast, won a silver medal at the World Cup in 1962 as a member of the Czechoslovak national team and received that same year the Golden Ball for the best football player in Europe. He is ranked among the top hundred world football players of all time.

Bican's grave is primarily decorated by his bust with his name and then an engraving of a football, above which is the inscription "football international". When his wife died in the year 2011, another gravestone was placed on the grave with her name and a message, which is a deeply personal message from his wife: *"It wasn't always easy, but life with you Josef was lovely"*. Masopust's gravestone (Figure 5), which was an initiative of the Club of Friends of Josef Masopust, is in the shape of a smaller football pitch. Apart from his date of birth and death, there is an engraving of his signature and a football. His signature is supposed to represent purity of play fair play. The model for the sculpture of the ball was the one used by Masopust in the year 1962 at the World Cup in Chile, where he achieved his greatest success. The artistic goal behind the execution of the gravestone was for the ball to loosely diffuse into the space and be transformed into "the shape of a heart as an expression of the fact that the famous football player was first and foremost a husband, father, grandfather, friend and primarily a model of honesty. (...) This therefore serves as Josef Masopust's eternal legacy primarily as a person" (Pašková, 2017). Both of these personages are linked by a

Figure 5. *Josef Masopust's gravestone*

love for sport, specifically to football, where they achieved remarkable successes. Their gravestones communicate that remarkable sports success also requires a remarkable character.

Additional interesting gravestones include those on the graves of personages such as the singer and musician Waldemar Matuška (1932–2009), the violinist Josef Suk (1929–2011) or the conductor Jiří Bělohlávek (1946–2017). All three of these personages are primarily linked by their relation to music, with this also being expressed in the stylization of their gravestones. All of them are also missing religious symbolism or inscriptions of this meaning. The singer Matuška ranked among the most well-known singers of the second half of the twentieth century. Near the end of the Communist regime, he had emigrated to the USA in 1986, where he became especially popular among the Czech and Slovak expatriate community. His marble gravestone is decorated with an engraving of the body of a guitar, his favourite musical instrument, which a number of his listeners associate him with. An engraving of one of his most well-known songs "Sbohem Lásko" (Farewell Love) is located on the left side. The words are the introductory words of the refrain of this song and sound as follows: *"Farewell love, allow me to go, allow me to go, it will be peaceful, no tears will help with my wandering feet, I truly loved you, what more can I give you, I'm not perfect, allow me to move on to another house"*. Another of the personages is Josef Suk (Figure 6) who was a renowned Czech violinist, a soloist in the Czech Philharmonic, the grandson of the world-famous composer Josef Suk the great-grandson of the composer Antonín Dvořák. He was also considered one of the finest performers in the world of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or Ludwig van Beethoven. His gravestone therefore has understandably a violin, which was symbolically broken in half as a result of his death. His authentic signature is consequently depicted underneath. The last of our list of aesthetically remarkable secular gravestones belongs to the conductor Jiří Bělohlávek, who conducted a range of renowned orchestras both at home and abroad and who was the head composer of the Czech Philharmonic during the last five years of his life, where he also tried to propagate musical works by Czech composers. The gravestone, apart from basic data, also contained the legend: "a renowned Czech conductor", an engraving of his signature and most interestingly an obelisk with his conducting notes which is particularly impressive.

Figure 6. *Gravestone of the violinist Josef Suk*

These gravestones are of interest due to several basic characteristics. This is first and foremost their secular character, which do not

contain any religious symbolism. In addition, the personages are linked by their love for music, with their gravestones expressing this connection both in words, as well as symbolically (in the form of the body of a guitar, the name of a song, notes for a violin or a conductor). Finally, there are personal signatures, which are understood in the Czech culture not only as an identification sign of the person, but also an expression of the character of the personage.

The secular character of gravestones in the national cemetery began to be completely normal during the period of Communism, where gravestones were built alongside each other with both Christian and secular themes. This trend is current and completely natural at present which demonstrates that this cultural space, thanks to the initial efforts of the nationalists, changed significantly over the course of the following 150 years.

Conclusion

This study attempts to answer several questions, which generally link academic study of religiosity in the Czech Republic. I consequently chose one of the important national and artistic gems, this being the national cemetery at Vyšehrad in Prague. The assumption behind this was that if this cemetery is a national symbol characterizing modern Czechness, then this cultural icon should correspond with the attitudes of Czech society to religion in the modern age. I further assumed that the attitudes of individuals to religion are not conditioned merely by personal experience, but also by the historical events which society undergoes, as these events have their own narrative power which influence public opinion, including attitudes to death on the part of society.

The findings have led to the following conclusions. First, religion is an important element of the grave architecture of the national cemetery from its founding up until the present, despite the fact that it does not clearly predominate at present. Second, a religious-patriotic or nationalist character was only of a time-limited duration, this being evidently the result of the obtaining of national independence. Third, the inscriptions and gravestones remained completely untouched by the ideological influence of Communism, with an extremely characteristic, for this time period, emphasis on the importance and significance of the deceased personages, which was, however, in my view not in ideological agreement with the concept of a classless and egalitarian society. Fourth, apart from a religious and national perspective, the perspective of secular humanism also became important, thus being manifest as the most distinct form of a message to the future generations, as it represented generally shared desires and values and was to a minimum possible extent subject to important historical events and the character of the time. Fifth, a significant part of the so-called final letters to the world, despite being personal considerations, corresponded to the spirit of the time in the sense that they adopted its discursive framework (religious, secular, national).

It is therefore apparent that, despite the relatively secular character of modern Czech society, the religious (Christian) theme of the national graveyard is an important and permanent element. It is present in all of the historical periods and

predominates significantly in some of them. The theme even became an important means of self-expression of the elite during the time of the Communist dictatorship. The secular humanist character of the gravestones, which are characterized by an emphasis on originality and the society-wide contribution of the deceased personages, consequently recedes over the long-term perspective. The character of this graveyard as a whole does not, however, clearly support the argument about a strongly secular or atheist character of Czech society, if we take into consideration its thorough break from religion.

The above-mentioned reasons therefore indicate that the Czech national graveyard can also be understood as a certain kind of ideological laboratory; thanks to it we can determine that it was apparently the idea of a nation, which helped Czechs overcome the hundreds of years of ideological conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. This was not, however, an idea of a nation, which would focus on one of these confessions, but one which represented its secular humanistic perspective, which primarily placed an emphasis on man, on its early humanity and upon the construction of humanitarian ideals. In the first phase of the building of the national cemetery, the religious theme tended to be presented as more of the beginning of the process of national emancipation, which was moving from a religious perspective to a national one, but which did not amount to a marginalization of religion. This would seem, from today's perspective, to reflect the fact that the efforts of nationalists were not established, over the long-term, by mere religious motivated nationalism, as was the case in neighbouring Poland or Slovakia, but seemingly not by any other. Neither religious nor secular nationalism were the phenomena, which became established over the long-term in the character of the national cemetery, or among the Czech intelligentsia. The development of modern Czech society instead tended to lead from national consciousness to Czechness, which, in my view, came about primarily through the attainment of political and national sovereignty.

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