

MONUMENTS FOR THE ROMANIAN HEROES OF 1917

Horia DUMITRESCU*

Abstract: During the Great War heavy battles took place on the Romanian territory, at Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz, in Vrancea County. In their memory were built the monuments presented below.

Keywords: war, heroes, gratitude, monument, Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz.

After two years of devastating war in Europe and after two years of neutrality, on August 14th 1916, Romania joined the right and saint war of union, of fulfilling the national aims, legitimate and ancient, of the Romanian people.

The inhabitants of Transylvania received the offensive of the Romanian army beyond the Carpathians with enthusiasm and joy. During only two months, the Romanian troops almost reached Sibiu. Being insufficiently supported by the countries of the Antanta, the Romanian army had to retreat fighting heroically for each piece of land. On the rivers Jiu and Olt, at Bucharest and Ramnicu-Sarat, the Romanian soldiers proved heroism simply legendary, sweeping away the intentions of the enemy to throw Romania out of war.

The front became stable on the alignment of the Eastern Carpathians, the lower course of the rivers Putna and Siret and of the big river Danube. Moldavia remained the only free part of the country. Here was the strength and the hope of the Romanian nation. After the recovery, after those intense preparations of June-July 1917, the fights of the Romanian army were to become real in the bright victory from Marasti since 24th - 30th of July 1917.

In that situation, the new plans of attack of the enemy had as their aims the breaking of the Moldavian gate at Marasesti, on Siret and the opening of the road to Iasi, the defeating of the army and the abolishing of the Romanian state.

The answer of the Romanian army came with a powerful force: „*Nobody passes by here!*”. Between July 2st - August 2st 1917, at Marasesti at the neighborhood, at the hard price of the sacrifice of blood and life, the soldiers „*made brought into darkness the dreams of a easy conquest of the country*”, their heroism „*shuddered the world ...*”, stopped the enemies' offensive and changed the battle into a bright and resounding Romanian victory. The First Romanian Army, its commander and the same of the battle from Marasesti won the eternal victory.

* Member of Academy of Romanian Scientists.

During the long, painful and heart-breaking days and nights of the battle, the names of Marasesti, Doaga, Strajescu, Moara Alba, Moara Rosie, Razoare forest were written with letters of fire and blood. On the name of the battle shines eternally the day of August 6th 1917.

In the same day, in front of the military German giant that started the attack in 4-5 successive waves on the direction of Razoare forest - Marasesti, interposed the 13th Division Infantry lead by the general Ion Popescu, formed by the Regiments no. 47, 51 and 50. The Divisions no. 9, 14 and 10 defeated the other sectors. The whole progress of the fight was under the command of the general Eremia Grigorescu. His lucidity, courage, abnegation, his perfect experience and military formation had a decisive role in the success of the resistance and in the changing of the battle into a great victory.

On the battle field of Marasesti gave their lives over 480 officers and over 21.000 soldiers and graded soldiers. Then and there heroically died Grigore Ignat of the regiment 51 Infantry with all his people, Gabriel Pruncu, the corporal Musat and the hero - child Mariuca Ion Zaharia.

At Marasesti was born again the soul of the Romanian nation and it also raised on the climax of the eternal glory.

At Marasesti, the arm of the Romanian soldier was strengthen by the superiority of the knowledge, they valued life as long as it served for the ideal fore which the soldier was fighting: the Liberty and the unity of the country and of the Romanian nation.

The initiative of building the Heroes' Mausoleum in Mărășești belonged to the Romanian Women National Orthodox Society within the Congress that took place on June 8th 1919, in the Senate Hall in Bucharest.

In this scope, it was constituted a committee made up of great personalities of the time, under the presidency of Princess Alexandrina Gr. Cantacuzino.

On October 8th 1919, during a memorable ceremony, was set up the place where it was to be built the Church of the Nation, a place that was pointed out according to the tradition with an iron cross brought from the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Suceava. Georges Ulise Negropontes donated the land on that was built the monument, on July 14th 1921.

In 1921 was organized a competition for the best project for the construction of the mausoleum, a competition that was won by the architects Georgette Cristinel and Constantin Pomponiu but because of the lack of funds, the winning project was abandoned, The current monument was erected according to the plans of the architect George Cristinel.

The foundation of the future memorial monument was set up on August 6th 1923.



Heroes' Mausoleum Mărășești

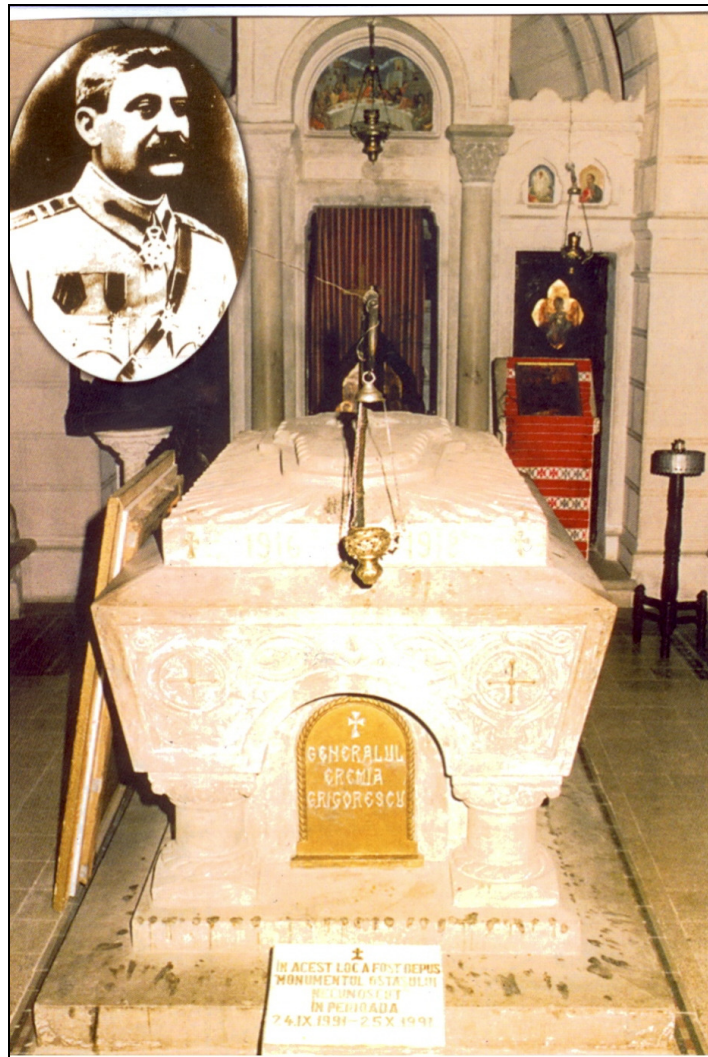
In the summer of 1924 began the re-burying of the bones of the soldiers dead on the battle field, in the crypts of the mausoleum and in September there were deposited in the central sarcophagus the remains of General Eremia Grigorescu, commander of the 1st Romanian Army during the battle of Mărășești.

On September 27th 1924 took place the ceremony of the crypts' inauguration, in the presence of Queen Mary and of some high personalities of the time.

After 12 years, there were started again the works for the construction of the monument's dome, known under the name of „*The Dome of the Glory*”, its bas-reliefs being sculpted by Ion Jalea and Corneliu Mendrea and in the interior was painted in fresco by Eduard Saulescu.



The sarcophagus of general Eremia Grigorescu and The Chapel



Detail of the sarcophagus of general Eremia Grigorescu

On September 18th 1938, in the presence of King Carol II, of many personalities and of an impressive crowd, took place the ceremony of the inauguration of the mausoleum.

The Mausoleum shelters in those 154 individual crypts and 9 commune crypts, disposed in a radial manner on those 18 passages, a number of 5.073 soldiers and officers, among them being the heroine-girl Măriuca Zaharia, the captain Grigore Ignat, the lieutenant Gabriel Pruncu.

On the frontispiece of the Mausoleum were written the words „*For the Slave of Nation's Heroes*” and the name of the localities where took place the main battles on the Romanian front.



Cupola of Glory

It was inaugurated at 18th of September 1938 in the presence of King Carol II.
It shalter 154 individual crypts' and 9 in commune, for 5.073 soldiers and officers.

The historic destiny of the Romanian area, between Siret and the tops of Vrancea Mountains, characterized by Nicolae Iorga as „*a small image of the Great Romania*”, made that, during only summer, the one of the year 1917, by the dramatic, heroic and sublime effort of the Romanian Army, from the clenching with an enemy that had as goal deleting Romania from the European map, to be condensed here the whole time of our becoming comprised between past and future.

At that moment, in the name and for the liberty of the Country, for the fulfilment of the sacred right of the Re-completion of the Romanian people, at Soveja and Câmpuri, at Panciu and Străoane, at Muncelu and Varnița, at Mărăști, at Doaga and Mărășești, thousand of officers and soldiers caught in the hora of fire and death of the battles, they kneaded with their blood and sweat the country's clay, raising an obstacle that couldn't be passed in front of the enemy.

To them, to the Heroes of Nation, as a sign of our gratitude and our eternal remembrance, the future generation built for them, in every village and town of our district, the monuments. To them and their saint bones have been lasted Mausoleum at Mărășești, Mărăști, Soveja and Focșani, temples of heroism and sacrifice in the name of saint national ideal, temples of praying and veneration, symbols of durability and continuity for eternity of the nation born between Carpathians Mountains and Black Sea.

Since then and forever, the people of Vrancea walk on their lands with shyness, with a tremble in the heart in order not to disturb the quietness of the heroes on whose hearts are built the present and the future of Romania.

Mărăști Mausoleum was raised on the place of the battle of 9-17th of July 1917, at initiative of „Mărăști” Society, according to the plans of architect Pandele Șerbănescu.

The basement stone was put in 10th of June 1928.

On the main face there are 15 marble plates, with the name of 1.700 heroes.

Bas-relief are the work of sculptor Aurel Bordenache.

The basement is shelter for sarcophagus of Marshal Alexandru Averescu, generals Arthur Văitoianu, Alexandru Mărgineanu and Nicolae Arghirescu.



Mărăști Mausoleum



The bust of the Marshal Alexandru Averescu (1859 – 1938)

Sculptor: Oscar Späthe



Bas – relief (details)



Bas – relief (details)



The sarcophagus that shelter bones of Marshal Alexandru Averescu

The Heroes' Mausoleum from Soveja

The Heroes' Mausoleum from Soveja was raised between 1923 - 1928, according to the plans of the architect George Cristinel and it was inaugurated in 1929.

Ossuary shelter the bones of 2.000 unidentified soldiers and the crypts' 800 known soldiers.

Soldiers that you died for the country, brave people of faith, soldiers wherever in the graves you lie, rest in peace.

Those who died for the country on the field of the rich plain.

Sacrificing an entire spring, They didn't die but they resurrected.



Soveja Mausoleum

Inscription – Soveja Mausoleum

Soldiers that you died for the country,
brave people of faith, soldiers
wherever in the graves you lie,
rest in peace.

Those who died for the country on the
field of the rich plain
Sacrificing an entire spring,
They didn't die but they resurrected.