Lapidari 1: Texts

Jonida Gashi

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Inscriptions on commemorative plaques, lapidars, and other historical monuments fulfill a double function: they convey information about historical events commemorated or celebrated, while also being part of the larger monumental complex. They are therefore signs and at the same time components of higher systems of signs. For this reason, any attempt to study the structure of these texts and the way they constitute historical discourses cannot but transcend the limits of simple linguistic analysis. What follows, is a first effort so far, albeit preliminary, to make sense of how political power in Albania during the 1945–1990 totalitarian period relied on these macro-signs in order to normalize recent history also through the elaboration of official texts that met certain formal and functional criteria, for the final purpose of legitimizing itself in the eyes of the public.

The inscriptions on commemorative plaques and lapidars differ according to what is commemorated: a heroic act, a battle, or another important event, the martyrs of village or a zone, or the National Liberation War in general. However, from one inscription to another, we may determine several patterns that have to do with the structure of the text.

It easy to notice, for example, that many inscriptions contain a deictic element, which corresponds to the adverb of place here, and which may take different forms, including being complemented by place names – such as "here in Ngurëz" [ALS–328], "here on the Kash pass" [ALS–341], "here in Vëlush" [ALS–231], "here in Çarçovë" [ALS–254] – or articulated in word groups, such as "in this place" [ALS–255], "around this place" [ALS–165], "in this zone" [ALS–198]. In fact, spatial anchoring through deixis is one of the fundamental semiotic functions of the lapidar, plaque, or monument; these works themselves are, before everything else, small arrows that show a particular place, or little flags planted straight into the ground. This is independent from the fact that in the majority of cases the lapidar, plaque, or monument itself plays a deictic function and its reinforcement in the inscription, by means of merely linguistic elements, is redundant.

Locative deixis is counter-balanced by numbers, starting with dates of the type "on July 6, 1943" [ALS–260], which anchor, this time on the calendar, the events that the text speaks of and which the inscription and the monument itself aims to commemorate. As a rule, the date follows immediately after the deictic constituent: "in this place on July 11, 1943" [ALS–255], ”Here on July 2, 1943, heroically fell…” [ALS–280], “here on 7/10/1943” [ALS–596]. Thus, the place where the lapidar, plaque, or monument has been erected is tied, by means of the text, to a unique date on the calendar, or a unique place on the timeline of history. This relation, between the place where something has happened and the pertinent date, does not have any significance in itself, but only serves to certify the truthfulness of the event.

The dates within the texts are also attached to other numbers, which sometimes refer to the fallen: “14 parti-

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1 As regards textual deixis I rely on Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, L’Énonciation (Armand Colin, 2013), pp. 39–78. For a summary presentation of Émile Benveniste’s concept of shifters (em-

2 In the official version of Albanian history, approved by the totalitarian regime of Enver Hoxha, the period of the National Liberation War is presented as especially rich in events and significant dates; or with a great chronological and mnemonic density, to speak with a term of Eviatar Zerubavel, Time Maps: Collective Memories and the Shaping of the Past (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 24–34. The maps of the geographical distribution of lapidars confirm and certificate this density, reminding us that each case of the present is a product of a historically intensive yesterday. For this reason, still according to Zerubavel’s framework, the National Liberation War would represent a “sacral” period in the history of Albania and the Albanians, alongside – let’s say – the period of the anti-Ottoman resistance of Gjergj Kastrioti-Skënderbeg. This asymmetry, or unequal distribution of history on the chronological line, do not only relate to the calendar and material presentations of history, such as books, monuments (including lapidars) en museums, but also touch directly on the collective memory itself. Zerubavel notices that Lévi-Strauss, when talking about this oscillation in chronological density of remembered events, he compared it with the sinusoids derived from the measurements of a historical pressure gauge.
sans were killed” [ALS–198], “302 martyrs fell in the battlefield” [ALS–231], “in memory of the 65 fallen martyrs and victims in Orman Çiftlik” [ALS–103]; some other time to the losses in the ranks of the enemy: “25 Germans were taken captive” [ALS–254], “the enemy was disoriented and left 60 killed” [ALS–260]; furthermore to the victims of the War: “the German Nazis massacred 27 men” [ALS–255]; and also to the number of fighters: “around 300 volunteers from the villages of Kolonjë” [ALS–260]; or other numbers that identify military formations: “a battalion of the first Brigade” [ALS–179], “the 7th Brigade” [ALS–231], “the forces of the second Brigade” [ALS–266], etc.

Because of their identifying role, all numbers and especially dates function like proper names. For that reason they may also be included in a large group of proper names featured in the texts on lapidars, plaques, and monuments – usually as personal names (anthroponyms) and place names (toponyms). These latter ones are directly related to and rely the deictic force of the pertinent adverb, or of the monument itself. But they may also refer to a broader zone, relating to the community that has placed and maintains the plaque: “the people of the zone of Shijak” [ALS–164], “from the mountain region of Nemërçkë until the Qarr pass” [ALS–254], “glory to the martyrs of the village Lekdush” [ALS–367].

Anthroponyms represent a second important group among the proper names – appearing mainly as names of martyrs, occasionally organized in long, enumerated lists (which sometimes stand for the rows and columns of military formations). Even though lapidars, commemorative plaques, and other similar monuments are functionally different from martyrs’ cemeteries, the typological similarities between these two types of signs are beyond discussion. The most important martyrs – if we may put it this way – have their own plaque dedicated to them: “In this place in June 1944, Hero of the People Zaho Koka fell on the field of honor and glory in a fight with the German Nazis.” [ALS–432]. Different from a gravestone, which contains biographical data of the one who is buried, such as date of birth and death, the texts on these plaques relate to the heroic act of the fallen, not to the body of the deceased itself. Other common names are those of military formations: the Naim Frashëri battalion [ALS–285], the partisan unit of Mokër [ALS–496], the battalion of Krujë-Ishëm [ALS–691], the Misto Mame battalion [ALS–401]; or of military commanders such as comrade Enver [ALS–328], Mehmet Shehu [ALS–179], and Hysni Kapo [ALS–634].

Otherwise, the texts shown on such monuments enclose in themselves a simply informative part that fuses places, calendar, and people into a thick discourse of an essentially historical nature; as well as another, rhetorical part, emotionally colored and rich in all kinds of lexical cliches, which aims to convey the attitude of the text toward the commemorated events.

That this attitude will be more or less solemn is fairly determined by the commemorative nature of the text itself – which aims to elevate an act or a historical event by honoring it simply with its presence, but also by means of its words. It happens rarely that this second, expressive, part of the text is lacking:

ON 6/1/1944 A BATTALION OF THE FIRST OFFENSIVE BRIGADE AND A BATTALION OF DUMRE UNDER THE COMMAND OF MEHMET SHEHU LAID AN AMBUSH FOR A GERMAN CONVOY. THEY CAUSED GREAT DAMAGE TO THEIR MATERIALS AND MEN. [ALS–179] (fig. 1)

This may be compared to:

AROUND THIS PLACE ON NOVEMBER 20, 1943, OUR SONS, ARRESTED BY THE GERMAN NAZIS, WERE INTERNED IN CONCENTRATION CAMPS. THEIR STRUGGLE FOR THE SACRED IDEALS OF
THE FREEDOM OF THE COUNTRY WILL ALWAYS REMAIN IN OUR MINDS AND HEARTS. [ALS–165] (fig. 2)  

Here the second sentence, marked in boldface, departs from the narrative in order to express the attitude of the text.

Clichés like “fell heroically,” “will inspire for centuries,” “sacred ideals of the freedom of the fatherland,” “as a sign of deep recognition,” “were murdered barbarically,” “were tortured barbarically,” “fell with bravery,” “for the defense of the dear borders of the fatherland,” “fought bravely,” “your works [are] a source of inspiration,” “fell on the field of honor and glory” are commonly used as evaluative and expressive elements. Also the usage itself of the verb fall (Alb. bie) with the meaning “killed in battle” is stereotypical and characteristic for the solemn style of these texts.3 In several, more rare cases, the entire inscription consists of a text with an expressive and evaluative character, while the historical information remains implicit, or is given in other ways:

FOR THOSE WHO SWEPT ONLY ONCE:  
EITHER WE BUILD A NEW WORLD  
OR NONE OF US WILL REMAIN ALIVE [ALS–235]  
YOUR MOTHER BORE YOU FOR A NEW WORLD  
YOU HONORABLE HEROES  
THAT FELL FOR THE FATHERLAND [ALS–419]  
THEY DID NOT PUT FRESH FLOWERS  
ON THE ALTAR OF FREEDOM  
BUT THEIR BLOOD AND LIFE [ALS–81]  

A good part of the expressive clichés have to do with the death in battle, to the extent that many of those texts commemorate martyrs or events where someone has been heroically killed while fighting with bravery against the occupiers and traitors.4 In so far as they are commemorated, such deaths are always heroic; in the sense that those who are killed are transformed into heroes through the way in which they have died. Among those clichés, fell heroically turns out to be used the most in texts – and this heroism is directly attributed to the act, and only indirectly to the person who is killed.5

Some of the inscriptions also contain textual elements of a metalinguistic (self-referential) nature, which no longer refer to history nor to the place where the lapidary or monument has been erected, but rather to the lapidary, plaque, or monument itself, making explicit the reasons for their erection. Such elements are formulas of the type “Dedicated to the memory of…,” “Dedicated to the martyrs…,” “A sign of deep recognition…,” “In memory of…,” or other formulas as well, most often of the type “Glory to the brave partisans…,” “Glory to the martyrs…,” etc. Such constructions are often elliptical, because the verb is absent. This is otherwise characteristic for funeral inscriptions as much as for the texts in public slogans and in other inscriptions of a political nature. The reason, for as far as we can investigate in the present context, has to do with the need to keep the subjective agency that enabled the monument and the inscription itself to a certain distance.

Such formulas, which often encapsulate a performative interconnected with the dedicatory act of the monument, also express subjectivity; to the extent that they directly convey the subject of the enunciation into the text.6 Here we may well ask who precisely is the one

Kleanth Dedi, raise several concerns regarding the nature of the inscriptions on “monuments” and decry the “standardization,” “unemotional phrase construction,” “lack of originality,” and “mania for writing everything on a small plaque.” The authors seek to minimize the “bureaucratic” characteristics of the inscriptions by relieving it from details, and to strengthen the expressivity of the texts “with all the more tendentious and emotional language.” It is not clear to what extent the authorities haven taken their recommendations into consideration. To my mind, the importance of the documentary character of the lapidars, as certificate of historical genuineness and codifier of the past, has escaped them. See “Disa probleme edhe masa për të ngritur me kriterë më të drejtë monumentet, përmendorët, buzet, lapidarët, dhe pilakinë përkuftimore,” AqSH, f. 511, v. 1970, d. 86, pp. 2–22, at pp. 9–11; see also this volume, p. 47.

With the “subject of the enunciation” I mean what French theoreticians of textual analysis call sujet de l’énonciation or sujet discours and which, without entering a debate and theoretical analysis, I will define as “the linguistic instance where the text is produced” (even though it would be more precise to say “the instance where the text is produced, based on contextual data that the consumer of the text has at his disposition”). For more about this question, see Kerbrat-Orecchioni, L’Énonciation, pp. 190ff. For our analysis it is important to differentiate this subject of the enunciation (or the process that produces the utterance) from the grammatical subject of the utterance. Pragmatics deals with the former, syntax with the latter. Even though, for practical purposes, we can also identify this subject of the enunciation with the “real” author or narrator of a text, it is again better to keep in mind that the subject of the enunciation always manifests itself through specific elements in the text – personal and possessive pronouns, shifters, and other words with a relational meaning, verbal tenses, persons, verb moods (such as the administrative), pronominal particles (ethical dative), and so on. As a grammatical category (in the broad sense), the subject of the enunciation is always present during the practice of reading the text. Another

3 For the clichés of the public discourse of totalitarian Albanian, see Ardjan Vehbiu, Shqipja totalitare (Botime Çabej, 2007), pp. 179–83.

4 For the death cult in the public discourse of totalitarian Albanian, see ibid., 215–18.

5 Dr. Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei was so kind as to send me a fragment from an official document from the Central Albanian Archive, where two specialists in the field, Kujtim Buza and

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dedicating the lapidar “to the memory of...,” shouting “glory...” or explaining that the monument has been erected “as sign of deep recognition....” The simple and seemingly logical answer that this is said by the constructors of the monument is, in fact, circular. Moreover still, the subject of enunciation shows itself in the fully expressive or rhetorical part of the epigraphic texts, including the epithets and other rhetorical figures. And the fact that these rhetorical elements are, to a great extent, stereotypical – of the type “fell heroically,” or “was tortured barbarically,” etc. – we may well think that this subject is the representative of a collective consciousness, which is also asked to maintain alive the memory of the National Liberation War.

In similar analyses, the traces of the subject of the enunciation in such texts have also been sought in presuppositions (enthymemes) that underlie enunciations, or in the rather simple deduction that the one saying about the martyr that he “fell heroically” shows publicly that he supports the side of the fallen; and the one saying “tortured him barbarically” necessarily feels hostility toward the torturers. Other words and expressions too, such as “the victory of our popular revolution,” “the happy life we enjoy today,” “partisan heroism,” “massacred,” and especially the designations used for the enemy, such as “the German forces and their tools,” “reaction,” “occupying Nazi forces,” “Nazi occupiers,” “Italian Fascists,” “German and National Front forces,” “treacherous forces of Legality,” etc., do not only show the spiritual engagement of the subject of enunciation, but also do so by standardized, stereotypical means following a rather rigid template. The ways in which the enemy may be called are, essentially, elaborated and sanctioned in the workshops of the historical discourse about the War; it is important that these rhetorical elements are, to a great extent, stereotypical – of the type “fell heroically,” or “was tortured barbarically,” etc. – we may well think that this subject is the representative of a collective consciousness, which is also asked to maintain alive the memory of the National Liberation War.

As a master metaphor, blood, weaves a complex network of meanings around itself, interconnected though not identical. So, at the moment of death, the martyr gives his blood “for the dear issue of the party and people, for the victory of our popular revolution, for the happy life that we enjoy today” [ALS–138]. Nevertheless, it is not clear whom exactly this blood is given

In this grand war you comrades of myzeqe
have given your great contribution with
the blood of your sons, with your help, with
your sacrifice. [ALS–328] (fig. 3)

In relation to the community, the fallen ones are always sons – this is related to the young age of the martyrs, or to the codified need to always consider them young, whereas the community itself is considered, before anything else, to consist of mothers and fathers. This seemingly innocent mannerism allows the communities themselves to be seen as articulations of generations, which are interconnected not only by means of their life together, but also through blood. This also means that the blood spilled on the battle field is also of the respect

to, even though the semantics and syntax of the verb to give require so. Different from authentically religious or mythological discourse, where the sacrifice is made to the gods (or the king, etc.), in the totalitarian discourse of a state that purports to be atheist, the offer of blood is made to the future or the stream of history.

In addition to life, blood also signifies the belonging of the physical body, usually the martyr’s, to the community, owing to the traditional and embedded meaning of the word, which refers to the clan, tribe and, eventually, race (in the folk-historical meaning). So blood is also the element that links together generations, especially within a community:

Fig. 3.ALS–328 (detail)

tell the Spartans, passerby...” which Herodotus recalls about the inscription in Thermopilae – and where the text speaks directly to the occasional traveler. In fact, the question whom is talked to cannot be separated from the other question, namely who speaks – the authority, governmental power, and community. Otherwise, on the surface of the text, the signs of the participants or parties in the discursive act of reading do not appear except indirectly; the suppositions (enthymemes) of the text connect, with invisible wires, the subject of the enunciation with the receptive end of the discourse, which has no other way to take an active part in this exchange, except by appropriating the text and transforming the monologue of the inscription into its own monologue.

The epigraphic texts tend, therefore, to be written in the third person and belong to what Benveniste, and others semiotists of the French school after him, have called “historical narrative” (récit historique); and which, in that language, is signified before anything else by the verbal forms of the aorist (passé simple), which is exclusively used for this type of discourse. Something similar can also be pointed out about the aorist in the inscriptions that we are analyzing: ranë, goditën, asgjesuan, demonstroi, dhanë gjakun, u internuan, u vrânë, zurnë prîtë, u plagosën, masakruan, u kapën robër (fell, hit, annihilated, demonstrated, gave blood, were interned, were killed, laid in ambush, were wounded, massacred, were made hostage), etc. Those forms of the simple past in Albanian, even though not as exclusively as in French, serve also to give the texts a historical tonality, or to present the events these texts refer to as irreversible, because they are frozen in the past, a deposit of the final truth. This also directly conditions, as we will see, the truth-value of the inscriptions – a critical factor in the reception of the inscriptions themselves and the consolidation of the official version of history. Only in rare cases do the inscriptions break the code of historical narrative to allow for personal forms of discourse: “your work [is] a course of inspiration” [ALS–412] contains a second person plural form, which means that the subject of enunciation, whoever that may be, speaks “directly”

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10 This verbal tense does not exist in English, and is usually translated with the past tense. – Ed.
12 According to Yurchak (op. cit.) in totalitarian texts, where author and authority often coincide, the author himself aims to present himself not so much as the "producer" of (new) knowledge but rather as the "mediator" of the (pre-existing) knowledge or information that is conveyed. In our case, the truth of the information presented in the inscriptions on lapidars was neither selected, nor valued by the drafter of the inscriptions; but merely reproduced, obtained from a "depository" of eternal truths.
to the martyrs as if these were present in the communicative context. The first person plural, the *we* of the community or collective subject, depository, guard, and spokesperson of the collective memory, occurs somewhat more often: “they gave their blood [...] for the victory of *our* popular revolution and for the happy life that we enjoy today” [ALS–138], “their battle [...] will always remain in *our* minds and hearts” [ALS–165]. When the first person plural is used, it also serves to actualize the text of the inscription, especially if we accept that the reader interiorizes the monologue and mentally fuses his own subject with the collective that “speaks.”

Nonetheless, the inscriptions on lapidars and other commemorative monuments are almost never “signed.” Neither the author of the work and the inscription itself, nor the “authority” in whose name the monument is completed and placed is noted on it, including also the inscription (cf. the s.p.q.r. of classical inscriptions in Rome). Even the date of the erection of the lapidar is only rarely mentioned, although this shouldn’t be interpreted as if the author(s) and authorities prefer to remain in the shadows or anonymous. Rather, it should be taken as an attempt to transform the sign into something absolute, or into a part of the landscape – geographically and historically.⑬

On the other hand, the semiotic interaction between the visitor, the inscription, and the lapidar or monument itself is articulated into three chronological nodes: (a) the date or place on the calendar of the historical event that is commemorated, and which is usually found explicated in the epigraphic text; (c) the current date, or the actual moment when the visitor reads the plaque and consumes the inscription by reading it, virtually in order to learn about the event that is commemorated; and (b) the date when the lapidar was erected as a material and rigid mediator between the historical date and the current moment. This triangle, where each corner represents one temporal node, is nothing but the semiotic triangle of the signifier, the signified, and the referent – respectively the inscription in the act of being read (and the entire monumental context, if we prefer), the date of the erection of the inscription (which remains hidden or invisible), and the historical event, as the referent which remains outside the sign.

During the period *a–b*, between the event itself and the day when the lapidar has been erected, history still exists in a fluid state, like as yet unhardened concrete; the event remains open to interpretations and the authorities have not yet made a final choice between “competing” truths – a situation similar to Schrödinger’s cat in the famous conceptual experiment. With regard to said specific event, history exists more like a superposition of personal variants and unsynchronized memories engaged in deadly competition. The erection of the lapidar (*b*) and the placement there of the plaque with the inscription about “what has happened” represents also the moment when this fluid history finally crystallizes or codifies, and is ready to be given to the public for consumption. Actually, the very fact that the epigraphic text is chiseled in stone or in any case written in a strong and virtually unchangeable material (marble, granite, metal, concrete, etc.) shows that the inscription contains the finally settled event – the unique and univocal truth of the capital letters of the inscription normalizing the previously divergent and superimposed truths. So great is the heuristic force of inscriptions, that they are expected

⑬ From a functional, or semiotic, perspective, the lapidars or similar monuments are meant to be seen from some distance – or to stand out in the middle of the landscape, where natural or artificial. They are distinctive symbols, similar to small flags or pins on topographical maps – and only by being noticed from far away, they are able to fulfill their function as “calendar stones” – or as semiotic equivalents of milestones. The inscriptions, however, cannot be read from this relatively large distance. On the contrary, the reading and public consumption of the inscription is done from another distance, much closer, from where also several other, simply visual aspects of the monument stand out, e.g. a bas-relief, statue, or ornament, symbolic or abstract. Now, even without excluding that people approach the lapidar simply out of curiosity, because they have noticed it from afar, we would accept that, under normal circumstances, when at least the local audience knows what this or that lapidar or monument represents, the lapidar itself fulfills a *double* function: as pure index (“here”) at some distance, and from nearby as an index accompanied by symbolical and iconic elements. If we accept this, then we would accept that the epigraphic inscription that accompanies the lapidar also provides an “explanation” of the monument, or an exposition of the reason for its erection, in the sense that the lapidar not only sanctions a historical event, but also adds it to the landscape as artwork, and, similar to other artworks needs an identification tag.
to extend forward in time while also correcting any possible mistake or imprecision made in the past.\textsuperscript{14}

As may be understood, the interest of the totalitarian regime in the codification of history is not simply of an academic or historiographic kind – we are speaking here about the history of the National Liberation War, or that conflict from which the governmental power relations in the post-War period (1945–1990) derived, alongside the elite that would lead the country with an iron fist. In fact, from its beginnings until its fall in early 1991, the regime installed after the War would rather find its own legitimacy in the National Liberation War rather than in formal mechanisms of legitimation, such as parliamentary elections. Also at a local level, the normalization of historical events was of a practical importance – as it sanctioned the communities involved in the War on the side of the National Liberation Front; and, by mentioning the names of the fallen and of the military formations, legitimized a privileged layer of the families of martyrs and those of the War veterans. There were also other forms of legitimation, including certificates, decorations, orders and medallions, martyrs’ cemeteries, museum archives of the War and so on; but the lapidars and similar monuments were the only ones that kept the certification anchored in a territory (geography).

On the other hand, the public communicates directly with the inscription, not with the event itself; and, with the passing of the years, the historical date of the event and the date at which the lapidar with the inscription was erected will come to approach each other until they merge – or there will arrive a phase in which the map will merge with the territory and the lapidar itself, as macro-sign, will communicate while masking the distance that separates/d it from the event itself. So the three-sided interaction between the signifier (text), the signified (reason or rationale of the monument), and referent (historical event) will collapse into a two-sided interaction between the sign (monument) and the event it refers to. The role of monuments such as lapidars in the maintenance, reproduction, and amplification of codified history remembrance cannot be successfully fulfilled except through this flattening of the semiotic triangle.\textsuperscript{15}

Otherwise, as inscriptions in durable media and highlighted through more or less abstract and standardized structures, those of the lapidars belong to a quite heterogenous class of signs, which also include grave stones, monumental cemeteries (e.g., in Albania, martyrs’ cemeteries) and, from a different perspective, border markers, border stones, and other topographical signs that contribute to the organization of the territory.

The similarity of lapidars to grave stones and cemeteries manifests itself especially in those cases when they are dedicated to the fallen. Occasionally, e.g. in the case of ALS–204, where also the date of birth and date of death of the deceased are mentioned, the separation from a grave cannot and should not be made – because the cause of death “fallen in a fight with the occupiers and traitors…” can often also be mentioned on a grave. However, as a rule, the lapidar isn’t intended to mark the place where someone’s bones are resting, but rather to point at the event that brought death to the deceased (martyr, hero); it does not commemorate their death as much as the history that brought them to death. Maybe also because the image of death as the great equalizer had survived the change of world views, the martyrs’ graves on the monumental cemeteries show greater visual and stylistic consistency compared to the lapidars, which tend to keep their individuality.

For similar reasons, the graves of martyrs are usually found organized in the cemeteries; in a time that lapidars and similar monuments cannot be visualized separately from the geographical place where the commemorated event has happened; so much so, that in the case of someone who has fallen in the battlefield, the displacement of the body toward a cemetery is well-tolerated (“they took him to lie with his friends”), as long as the grave does not refer to a certain place, but only to the imaginary body of the person, whereas the link of the lapidar sign with the spatial referent would be lost as soon as the lapidar were to be moved – even if only because of the immediate shift in the meaning of the indexical demonstratives here, in this place, etc. On the contrary, in the inscription of a grave, the expression “here rests…” does not gain a different meaning even when the grave is displaced, because this displacement

\textsuperscript{14} Even from a merely geometrical perspective, the distance \(a–b\) between the commemorated event and the moment of the erection of the lapidar will, in a relative sense, continue to shrink or go toward zero with the passage of the years, or with the increase in distance between the current moment and the period in which the lapidar was erected (\(a–c\)), for the simple reason that the first one is fixed and unchangeable, whereas the second progressively increases by definition. This means that, with the passing of time, the moment of the erection of the lapidar (\(b\)) will seem to coincide with the historical date it refers to (\(c\))

\textsuperscript{15} Speaking about the historical monuments of the Soviet Union, Michael Yampolsky notices that “It is quite possible that the greatest achievement of Soviet culture was the maximal suppression of chronological time and the creation of illusion of stability and stasis indispensable for the functioning of the masses” (“In the Shadow of Monuments: Notes on Iconoclasm and Time,” in Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Twentieth-Century Russia, ed. Nancy Condee [Indiana University Press, 1995], p. 98).
would also presuppose the transfer of the buried body.

This notwithstanding, the functional similarity of lapidars with border stones, milestones, and other topographical signs of the administrative organization of the territory helps to better understand the role these monuments used to, and maybe continue to fulfill, within the collective rituals of historical commemoration.

As an indexical sign the lapidar only does as much as pointing with a finger, saying “here”; codifying the past and anchoring it in a territory, it sanctions the historical truth for the audience, simultaneously constituting and reproducing an interaction of governmental power with the geography.

The lapidar and other similar monuments fulfill this sanctioning or certifying function of history by connecting the descriptive text to the indexicality of the lapidar sign, which is attached to the territory like a thumbtack or a little flag on a map. This also means that the inscriptions on such monuments can and should be included in the category of documents that authenticate a fact as true, i.e., certificates – which have a use value to the extent that they are issued by an official authority. Actually, the erection of lapidars has always been a prerogative of the organs of local power; and the epigraphic texts have been approved by a constellation of authorities, including here the organs of propaganda of the Party Committees, the Institute of History of the Academy of the Sciences of the Republic, the Committee of War Veterans, the State Archive, the Archive of the Central Committee of the People’s Republic of Albania, and other sides interested in building and maintaining a definite version of the history of the National Liberation War, which would also support the present political situation in detail. 16

From the perspective of textual typology, several formal features, such as proper nouns, dates, other numerical data (such as number of deaths or captured enemies), and verbal forms of the simple past characteristic of the constative modality, bring the inscriptions on lapidars and other monuments significantly close to certificates. As is known, certificates are constructed based on a formulary text, which is completed with specific information by the drafter during the compilation of the document. So a typical form for an inscription would as follows:

HERE ON (date), THE PARTISANS OF (name of military formation) UNDER THE COMMAND OF (name of a known commander) WAGED FIERCE BATTLE WITH (name and type of enemy) DURING THE BATTLE (name of martyrs) FELL HEROICALLY, WHEREAS THE ENEMY LEFT (number in arabic numerals) KILLED AND WOUNDED ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

What is lacking on this form, compared to a normal certificate, is the initial performative (“I, the undersigned n.n., certify that…”) as well as the identifying data of the issuance of the certificate – date and signature, together with the stamp of the pertinent authority.

And yet this lack does not deprive the inscription of its heuristic force, because, under a totalitarian regime, each unsigned (unauthorized) public inscription either conveys state authority, or is immediately seen as hostile and destroyed. It remains open for discussion whether this certification embodies also another illustration of the saying that history is written by the victors. However, the fact remains that the empty signature, characteristic for all these monuments, can function only under a totalitarian regime, where the state owns not only the territory, but also the public space of communication. 17

16 Whether or not this formal sanction of historical discourse through the inscription is helpful for the preservation of collective memory can and should be discussed. In La Mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli (Éditions du Seuil, 2000), Paul Ricœur more than once returns to this term, starting with the myth of Thetis who gave the writing signs to the Egyptians – at the occasion of which he asks whether writing has harmed man’s capacity to remember, which from now on will be delegated to external signs. In fact, the historiography of the National Liberation War, codified in writing in official historical texts, school texts of the regime, central and local archives, central and local museums, and in monumental inscriptions, commemorative plaques, and lapidars, was always in conflict with the private memory of the generations that had lived through the War; those generations that, to a large extent, chose not to convey this personal memory to their successors, to protect them from the risk of ambivalent public and political experiences, as long as the problematization of the history of the War would in itself represent a thoughtcrime.

17 Otherwise, a similar monument erected after 1990 would need an inscription from the pertinent authority, or would remain private and irrelevant, such as the lapidars that commemorate traffic accidents or other private events without interest to the public – as in the meanwhile, to say it with Yurchak, there had occurred a performative shift, and the constative dimension of discourse was detached from its reference and exposed to uncontrolled interpretations (op. cit., p. 67). However, the current or post-totalitarian reading of the inscriptions on lapidars and other monuments erected during the totalitarian period will remain to be investigated in a later study, which will need to consider the absence of a certifying authority, the pluralist reading of history, the damaging of lapidars and the inscriptions themselves as contestation of the official historiography, but also as a continuation of a social and political conflict, and, at the same time, as a sign that stands for this conflict and, finally, additions or “additions” that have been made to monuments (without excluding vandalism), which can and must be dealt with as an undertaking of anonymous agents in the rewriting of history.