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THE WAR MEMORIALS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF CRNA TRAVA

Abstract. The municipality of Crna Trava is situated in Serbia's southeast region. The area extends from the Bulgarian border on the east to Predejane and South Morava River on the west. After the First Balkan War and the liberation from the Turks, the territory of Eastern Serbia, including the area of Crna Trava, was the target of permanent Bulgarian conquest goals. By siding with the aggressors and receiving their support, Bulgaria occupied parts of the Eastern and South-eastern territories of Serbia during the both World Wars. Those years the regular Bulgarian army committed numerous crimes against the civilian population, captured soldiers of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the First World War, as well as Partisans in the Second World War. The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of memorials, dedicated to soldiers and victims of wars on the territory of Crna Trava during the 20th century. This paper does not interpret the complex historical events and conflicting interests on the Balkans. The primary focus of the paper is on presenting records from the existing memorials

Keywords. First World War, Second World War, Serbia, terror, war victims, monuments.

1. Introduction

During the 20th century, neither war in Serbia nor Yugoslavia omitted the villages and people of Crna Trava. It started with the Balkan Wars in 1912. Later on, two World Wars took place. During every war, the aggressor committed crimes against the civilian population and captured soldiers. Following the First World War, the inhabitants of Crna Trava started to erect monuments, construct memorial fountains, and install plaques bearing the names of victims.

The survey of the territory of Crna Trava resulted in the discovery and documentation of 22 memorial locations and 44 memorial objects. All objects are recorded and their locations are tagged by geographic coordinates. According to the criteria of the Law on Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Serbia, the existing memorials cannot, except several monuments, be classified as immovable cultural property [1]. The requirement to document and preserve all existing memorials is mandated by ethical criteria, as opposed to those formally objective.

The lack of inhabitants in Crna Trava villages means that the existing monuments, memorial fountains, and plaques will either be destroyed or disappear in the upcoming years. While researching memorials in Crna Trava, the same attention was given to all memorials, from larger monuments to the smallest memorial plaques, which were mostly found on school buildings. The intention is to document the suffering of the inhabitants of the Crna Trava villages during the wars of the 20th century. The material that was collected is archived permanently and can be used for further research and publication

2. Location and population of the Crna Trava municipality

The Crna Trava municipality is situated on hilly and mountainous terrain, with an elevation range of 400 to 1500 meters. There are 25 settlements. An extremely pronounced trend of population decline has been occurring since the beginning of the 20th century. One of the examples is the municipal town of Crna Trava, where there were about 3,000 residents in 1926. According to the 1948 census, the population was 2051, and in 2022, 338 people were recorded. After the Second World War, in 1948, the municipality of Crna Trava had 13,615 inhabitants. Finally, based on the 2022 census, there are 1,063 inhabitants, living in the entire municipality [2]. Figure 1 presents a summary of the population from 1948 to 2022.

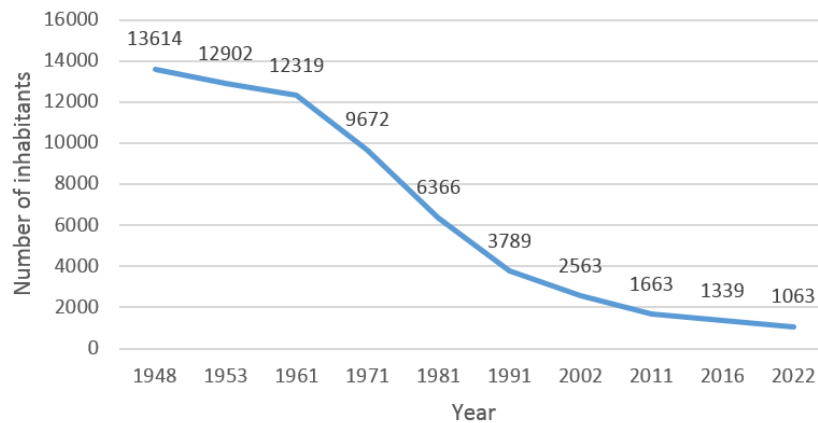


Figure 1. Census results in the municipality of Crna Trava during the period of 1948-2022

The first, and probably the predominant reason for the constant decrease in population are economic and social migrations. Also, until the middle of the 20th century, there was a loss of population during the Balkans and World Wars.

3. Occupations of Crna Trava during the wars in the 20th century

Bulgaria was one of the countries that profited from the turbulent times during the first half of the 20th century. Bulgaria took advantage of the World Wars to achieve territorial ambitions towards Serbia and Yugoslavia (Figure 2).

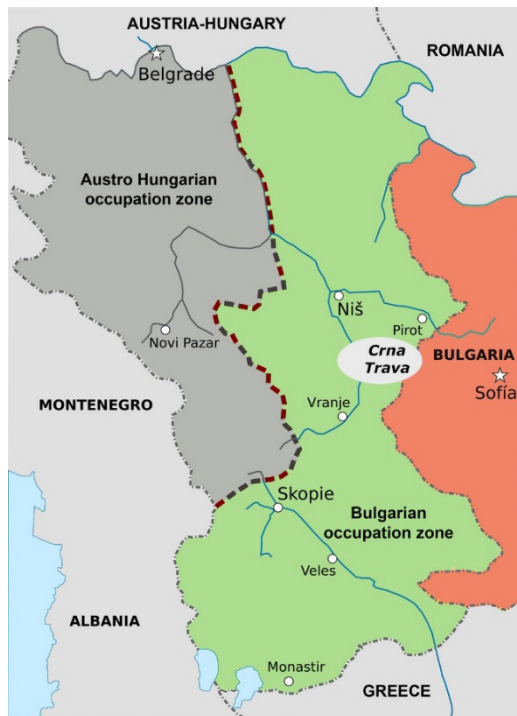


Figure 2.1. Bulgarian occupation zone of Serbia (17 November 1915–29 September 1918)

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c9/Occupied_Serbia_WW1.jpg



Figure 2.2. Bulgarian annexation of Serbia (1941-1944)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps_of_Yugoslavia_during_World_War_II#/media/File:1941-1943_Axis_occupation_of_Yugoslavia_map.svg

4. The First World War

Aligning herself with the Central Powers during the First World War, Bulgaria took over the eastern parts of the Kingdom of Serbia. The area of Crna Trava (Figure 2.1) was also included within the Bulgarian occupation zone. By the end of the war, the Serbian army liberated the occupied parts of the country.

The period of the Bulgarian occupation of eastern and south-eastern Serbia characterized repression and terror, committed against the population [3, 4]. Archival documents and other historical sources state: a violent change of national identity, sending citizens to internment in Bulgaria [5], and mass executions of civilians.

In addition to existing archival documents and historical sources, informal but valuable data about the Bulgarian terror and murdered soldiers are recorded on memorials. Usually the inscriptions contain names of the victims and years of death (Figure 3).



Figure 3. A monument commemorating Serbian soldiers who died in the Balkans and the First World War, Crna Trava (Photo: Z. Cvetković, August 2019)

After the war, several peace treaties were signed and several new states were formed. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was one of the newly established states. On November 27, 1919, the Treaty of Ney (French: *Traité de Neuilly-sur-Seine*) declared the post-war border with Bulgaria [6]. The obligations arising from the Treaty of Ney in Bulgaria were informally and unilaterally limited to 20 years.

5. The Second World War

Informal interpretation of the Treaty of Ney and Bulgarian territorial claims were realized during the Second World War. Bulgaria joined the Axis Powers and reoccupied parts of the eastern Serbia (Figure 2.2), including the territory of Crna Trava municipality [7, 8].

During the Second World War, the Bulgarian occupying army and Partisan liberation units were two main opposite sides on the territory of Crna Trava. The presence of Partisan units and armed resistance led to continuous Bulgarian crimes against the civilian population. Bulgaria's occupation policy has once again used violence to change national identities, send people to internment [9], and carry out mass executions against the residents of the annexed area of Yugoslavia. Figure 4 depicts an example of a list of victims, recorded on the monument in Dečeve.



Figure 4. Detail of the monument in honour of the victims of the Bulgarian camp in Dečeve (Photo: Z. Cvetković, July 2019)

6. Memorials

After every war, people of Crna Trava constructed memorials in honour of the war victims. Remembering relatives and neighbours, they built monuments and memorial fountains, posted memorial plaques and statues. Table 1 presents an overview of memorials, discovered during the research throughout the area of Crna Trava. The field research was carried out on July and August 2019. Memorial objects were discovered in 22 public locations. They were built in the form of monuments, memorial fountains, memorial plaques, and statues. The subject of this research were not monuments in cemeteries.

		1912-1918	1941-1945	1941-1945	
Location	Kind of memorial	Soldiers and civilians	Partisans	Civilian victims	Date of unveiling
Bistrica	plaque	no names	2 names	5 names	22 July 1956
Brod	memorial fountain	1 name			1992
	monument	1 name			2017
Crna Trava	monument	193 names			27 July 1926
	plaque		97 names	89 names	7 July 1954
	statue		2 names		
Darkovce	plaque	no names	24 names	24 names	13 July 1952
	memorial fountain				
Dečeve, internment	monument			75 names	4 July 1968
Dobro Polje	memorial fountain		13 names		4 July 1961
	monuments	1 name	1 name		
Dobropoljsko Polje	monument	to the unknown hero and soldiers	no names	no names	25 May 1951
	memorial fountain		no names		13 July 1976
	plaque			1 (1992)	2002
Dojčinovci	monument	1 name			
Gornje Gare	memorial fountain	no names	13 names	4 names	7 July 1952
	statue		1 name		11 November 1978
	plaque	no names	13 names	4 names	6 July 1952
Gradska	memorial fountain		16 names		22 December 1953
Jabukovik	plaque		event		7 July 1950
	memorial fountain		12 names	1 name	30 October 1963
Kalna	memorial fountain		21 names	20 names	29 November 1950
	memorial complex	122 names	21 names	21 names	4 July 1979
Krivi Del	memorial fountain	16 names		7 names	4 July 1966
Krstičevo	memorial fountain	7 names		2 names	29 July 1956
Mlačiške Meane	plaque		1 name		10 October 1951
	statues	2			
	plaque	41 names	62 names		4 July 1979

(continuation)		1912-1918	1941-1945	1941-1945	
Location	Kind of memorial	Soldiers and civilians	Partisans	Civilian victims	Date of unveiling
Mlačiške Meane	plaque		12 names		21 March 1969
	plaque		1 name		1 May 1979
	plaque		1 name		7 July 1953
Vicinity of Mlačište and Ruplje	memorial fountain		event		7 July 1950
Ostrozub	plaque		event		29 November 1950
Pavličine	plaque		14 names	14 names	1 May 1951
Pavlova gramada	monument				7 July 1955
Popovi	plaque		1		7 July 1953
	plaque		10 names		19 July 1970
	plaque			1	
Preslap	memorial fountain				1958
	plaque	no names	5 names	2	4 July 196
Ruplje	statue			1 (NATO)	1989
	monument		without names		1989

Table 1. The overview of memorials in Crna Trava municipality

Figure 5 depicts the map of visited locations and discovered memorial objects.

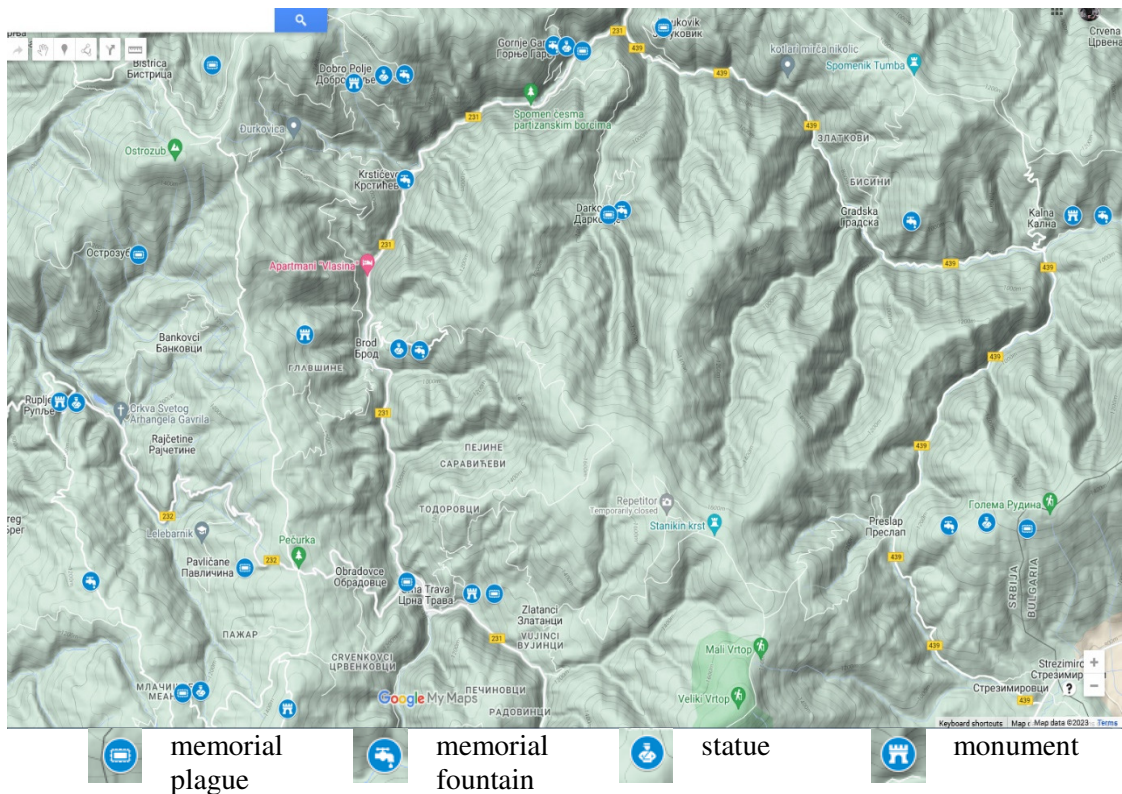


Figure 5. Map of visited locations and discovered memorial objects

4.1. Monuments. There are two types of memorials on the territory of Crna Trava. Some of them, more modest, were erected by families of fallen soldiers (Figures 6). Those monuments were built by local craftsmen.



Figure 6.1. Monument to the soldier Gavriilo Božilović (1890-1915), killed in 1915 at the age of 25 (Dojčinovci, July 2018, Photo: Z. Cvetković)



Figure 6.2. Monument to the Partisan Radomir Randelović (1915-1944), killed on Crni vrh near Knjaževac on June 23, 1944, at the age of 29 (Dobro Polje, August 2018, Photo: Z. Cvetković)

Another type of monument are objects, designed by architects and sculptors. They are dedicated to civilian victims and killed soldiers (Figure 7).



Figure 7.1. Monument to killed Partisans and victims of the fascist terror 1941-1945 (Ruplje, July 2018, Photo: Z. Cvetković)



Figure 7.2. Monument to the Unknown Hero and killed soldiers (1912-1918), killed Partisans and victims of the fascist terror (1941-1945) (Dobropoljsko polje, August 2018, Photo: Z. Cvetković)

The monument at Dećeve was unveiled on July 4, 1968. The design was based on a double obelisk. It is dedicated to the victims of the Bulgarian's camp, established during the Second World War at the location of Dećeve. The monument has plaques that bear the names of 75 victims (Figures 4, 8).



Figure 8. Monument dedicated to victims of the Bulgarian camp in Dećeve
(Photo: Z. Cvetković, July 2019)

The monument in Crna Trava was unveiled on July 27, 1926. It is dedicated to the soldiers killed in First World War. (Figure 3) Four plaques on the monument bears 193 names. The church ceremony, dedicated to consecrating the monument, lasted for three days [10].

The monument on Dobropoljsko polje was unveiled on May 25, 1951. It is dedicated to the Unknown Hero and all Serbian soldiers, killed in the both World Wars. The monument lacks a list of victims' names (Figure 7.2).

The "Tree of Freedom" memorial complex in Kalna was unveiled on July 4, 1979. It is dedicated to the victims of the both World Wars. The monument consists of three units. The central object of the complex is the "Tree of Freedom" (Figure 9.1). Nearby there are two parapets and the memorial part. The memorial part of the complex contains plaques with the names of the victims: 122 names, of those killed in the First World War (Figure 9.2) and 42 names, of those killed in the Second World War (Figure 9.3). The designer of the complex was the sculptor Dušan Nikolić.



Figure 9.1. Memorial complex "Tree of Freedom" in Kalna (July 2018, Photo: Z. Cvetković)



Figure 9.2. Plaques with the names of soldiers killed in the Balkans Wars and during the First World War (1912-1918)



Figure 9.3. Plaques with the names of victims killed in the Second World War (1941-1945)

(Note: Data about the memorial complex was provided by Ivana Cvetković, architect - senior conservator, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments Niš)

Monument at Pavlova Gramada was constructed in the form of a memorial building (Figure 10). However, the complex is now abandoned and destroyed.



Figure 10. Memorial building at Pavlova Gramada nearby Bainci
(Photo: Radosav Stojanović, 2010, source: Wikimedia)

4.2. Memorial plaques. Memorial plaques are the most common and simplest memorial objects, discovered during the research. Despite their size and modest appearance, memorial plaques sometimes include the long lists of victims (Figure 11). In some cases, the inscriptions solely documented the event (Figure 12).

The most common place, where memorial plaques can be found, are the buildings of schools in villages. The small population and unfavourable age structure of the inhabitants of Crna Trava lead to a small number of younger children. That's why the most of schools in Crna Trava are closed. The abandonment of the school buildings is a certainty and their end is imminent. Along with the demolition of the school buildings, the built-in memorial plaques will also disappear. Figures 11 and 12 display memorial plaques on the devastated school buildings.



Figure 11. Plaques dedicated to the murdered Partisans and victims of fascist terror in Pavličine during the Second World War (Photo: Z. Cvetković, August 2019)



Figure 12. Ostrozub, Commemorative plaque at the site of the battle between the Partisans and Bulgarian fascists in 1943 (Photo: Z. Cvetković, June 2019)

Some of the memorial plaques were placed on the houses of the killed heroes and patriots (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Memorial plaques at the birthplace of Aleksandar Stojanović, initiator of the National Liberation Movement in Crna Trava. The first plaque is dedicated to Aleksandar Stojanović. The second one is dedicated to ten members of his family, killed by Bulgarian fascists.

(Photo: Z. Cvetković, Popovi, June 2019)

4.3. Memorial fountains. Between the two World Wars, wealthier people considered endowing Serbia to be a matter of prestige. Donations of luxury buildings and palaces were most commonly made in bigger cities. At the same time, the richer people from Serbian villages also donated, but less luxurious objects. Those were fountains, built in villages and beside country roads. Based on this tradition, the people of Crna Trava built memorial fountains dedicated to the victims of wars.

After the past decades, the most of the memorial fountains in the villages of Crna Trava have dried up due to the extremely small population and not using them. But still they are not completely destroyed. Examples are depicted at Figures 14, 15 and 16.

4.4. Statues. Statues in Crna Trava are memorials that belong to the Second World War. They honour Partisans, who were national heroes and prominent fighters against the Bulgarians. Usually they are located in the centre of a village. The Figure 17 presents an examples of a statue in Mlačiške Meane.



Figure 17. The statue of the national hero Mladen Sinadinović in Mlačiške Meane
(Photo: Z. Cvetković, June 2019)

5. Conclusion

In the first half of the 20th century, Eastern Serbia, including the municipality of Crna Trava, was the target of expansionist plans by neighbouring Bulgaria. With the support of Austria, during the First World War and Germany, during the Second World War, Bulgaria occupied territory of eastern Serbia. During the occupation, the Bulgarian Army's regular units engaged in repression and crime against the civilian population and imprisoned soldiers. After every war, the people of Crna Trava built memorials that are dedicated to civilian victims and killed soldiers.

Despite the lack of historical documents and sources, this paper provides a summary of memorials constructed within the Crna Trava municipality in the 20th century. The field research was carried out in July and August 2019 and encompassed the whole area of Crna Trava. The Table 2 provides a review of memorial objects that have been found in 22 locations.

		1912-1918	1941-1945	1941-1945
	Sum	Soldiers and civilians	Partisans	Civilian victims
Monuments	8	7	4	2
Memorial fountains	11	5	6	5
Plaques	19	5	14	8
Statues	6		6	
SUM	44	17	29	15
Locations	22	13	10	9
Number of names	817	354	220	243
Memorials without names	12	6	5	1

Table 2. Summary of memorials in the municipality of Crna Trava

Data on the number of victims, listed in Table 2, are based strictly on the lists from the memorials and do not correspond to the actual number of victims. The reasons are:

- It happens that the same names are found on several different memorial objects.
- There are facilities that do not contain a list of victims.
- Memorials from the local cemeteries not included in this review.
- It's possible that the field research didn't discover all memorial objects.
- Administrative records of deaths are not included.
- Archive documents and other historical sources that contain data on victims were not examined.

According to the successive censuses, the area of Crna Trava is experiencing a continuous decrease in the number of inhabitants while the average age of the population is increasing. The future of memorials is indirectly affected by these extremely critical demographic parameters, as there will be no one to care for them. That is why the results of the research, presented in this article, can help to preserve, as a minimum, the documentation of the existing memorial facilities.

Finally, the collected documents and images are available for further research and the permanent preservation of memorials in the Crna Trava region. Also, this research can be a motivating factor to conduct similar researches in other, demographically threatened areas in Serbia.

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