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Ministry of Culture and the register of hidden burial-grounds in the Republic of Slovenia

Analysis of work completed between April 2002 and October 2004

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Historical introduction

The expressions “suppressed burial-grounds”, “post-war burial-grounds”, “caves”, or the currently most common term “hidden burial-grounds” are designations for burial-grounds of collective or individual victims of executions that took place at the end of the Second World War and even during the War. The victims were members of armed Partisan forces as well as civilians. “(Mass) post-war burial-grounds” is the term most commonly used by politicians, journalists and experts.

During the final operations at the end of the Second World War the armed forces that fought against the Slovene and Yugoslav National Liberation Army and the National Liberation Movement on the side of the German armed forces crossed the territory of Slovenia on their retreat toward the Koroško/Kärnten region in Austria. They were accompanied by a large number of civilians. Fearful of the Yugoslav Army and the new authorities, the fugitives were anxious to surrender to the English or American forces.

After 5 May 1945, members of various Slovene armed forces of the anti-Partisan camp withdrew to the Koroško/Kärnten region as well: members of the Slovene nationalist Home Guard, members of the nationalist Home Guard of the Gorenjsko/Upper Carniola region, part of the Police Corps of Ljubljana and some Chetniks. They were disarmed there by the British Army and interned in the plain of Vetrinj/Viktring near Celovec/Klagenfurt. Their number is estimated to reach ca. 10,000 or 12,000 and the number of civilians further 6,000 people. The defeated forces from other regions of Yugoslavia retreating to Austria were likewise anxious to surrender to the British units. Several thousand members of the Croatian nationalist Home Guard (Ustasha), Serbian soldiers and civilians thus arrived there as well. The Allied military authorities decided to hand over all the Yugoslavs that served under the German armed forces to Tito's authorities and were against accepting any further units from the territory of Yugoslavia. After a brief stay in the Koroško/Kärnten region between 27 and 31 May, all members of the Slovene anti-Partisan camp including civilians were returned by the Allies, their number amounting to the estimate of ca. 10,000 persons, including the civilians. Written documents, however, give various numbers, ranging from 8263 to 11,850.¹ Members of the Croatian and Slovene Home Guard were returned even before the above mentioned date, namely between 18 and 23 May, while members of the Serbian Voluntary Corps and the Serbian National Guard were returned between 24 and 27 May. According to a report by the Allies, 12,196 Croats, 8263 Slovenes, 5480 Serbians and 400 persons from Monte Negro were handed over to the Yugoslav authorities between 18 and 31 May.

Transports of the returned Slovenes led along two routes. The British troops transferred members of the Home Guard to the railway stations in Podgorje/Maria Elend and Pliberk/Bleiburg, where they were taken over by members of the Yugoslav Army and transported to Yugoslavia. They were transported from Podgorje through Podrožca and Jesenice and through the reception camps in Radovljica and Kranj to the Škofja Loka castle and the Diocesan Grammar School in Šentvid near Ljubljana where the central camp was located, while the transports from Pliberk reached Slovenj Gradec through Dravograd, from where the prisoners were directed to Teharje either on foot or by train. Two final transports reached the terminal destination through Maribor.

After a brief interrogation and probably an inquiry in their home towns, the prisoners were divided into three groups. Those from group C – which was the most numerous one – were executed soon after that. Most of them were transported by train from Šentvid to Kočevje and subsequently by lorries to the ravines in Kočevski Rog, while those from Teharje were transported mostly to the chasms of the coal mine in Stari Hrastnik. Prisoners from groups A and B were tried by military courts and most of them were sentenced to prison, while their property was confiscated. According to the decree passed by the AVNOJ Presidency on 3 August 1945, most of the surviving prisoners, primarily those under age, were released. All of them, however, did not return home; some of them were executed either extra-judicially according to the decision of local authorities or were killed by various informal groups of “avengers”, or they simply disappeared.

Those prisoners who had served in the German Army or armed forces under German command and had remained in Slovenia were summoned by the new authorities to report to them. They were imprisoned and submitted to the same selection as those in Šentvid and Teharje, only under a milder regime. They were led from prisons to the nearby killing grounds. Most of the members of the German minority and the Slovenes who were suspected of collaboration with the enemy were imprisoned in camps by OZNA. Those that were not banished or released were executed.²

After the Slovene and Croatian ethnic territory to the west of the Rapallo border (i.e. state border between Yugoslavia and Italy) were liberated and occupied, and after the occupational military administration was established, the Yugoslav authorities arrested several thousand people in Julijska Krajina and Benečija/Venezia-Giulia: Italians, Slovenes, Germans and others. Ca. 1,600 people ended either in karst ravines in the area around Gorica/Gorizia and Trst/Trieste or were deported to Yugoslavia where they were either killed or they died in prisons and camps.³

Members of other nations were also executed in Slovenia. They were mostly members of the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia (Croatian Ustasha and Home Guard), Chetnics from Monte Negro and civilians who had retreated across Slovenia to the Koroško/Kärnten region together with the armed units. Under British pressure, they mass surrendered to the Yugoslav Army near Pliberk on 15. May. On their return from Croatia they underwent mass killings along the Drava Valley, mainly by the Ustasha and Home Guard officers.⁴ Several soldiers and civilians were seized by units of the Yugoslav Army even prior to that, that is on their way from the Croatian border to that of Austria.

The decision for post-war killings was certainly made by the highest authority of Yugoslavia, whereas the order was probably issued by Josip Broz Tito, Commander in Chief of the Yugoslav Army. The “business” of killing, as far as the mass executions of the Slovenes were concerned, was executed by KNOJ and OZNA for Slovenia, with the participation of members of the Yugoslav Army from other parts of Yugoslavia.

The exact number of people killed in hidden burial grounds will probably never be known. The Institute for Recent History in Ljubljana is currently working on the project registering the victims of the Second World War in Slovenia. According to the latest data (of 1 April 2004), almost 90,000 people were killed during the War, or on account of it until February 1946,5 with at least 13,556 soldiers and civilians executed in post-war killings. These and members of the 4,500 civilians, Village Guards and Chetnics killed on the anti-Partisan side during the war constitute most of the victims buried in the hidden burial grounds.⁶

The reasons for such drastic reckoning with the Home Guard members and civilians are believed to be related with the main processes that took place during the war: occupation, collaboration, resistance and even civil war in part of the Slovene territory. Emotions played an important role or, rather, the desire for revenge and the tendency to deal with “the opponents of the revolution”, as well as “moral cleansing”. The fate of the Home Guard members did not remain unnoticed by the population. Prisoners who escaped from camps or prisons and especially those who were saved from the ravines of Kočevski Rog and

min shafts of Stari Hrastnik reported of it to their relatives and friends, and the later political emigrants wrote extensively of their fate. The subject, however, was unheard of in Slovene public life. Mass burial grounds were levelled, hidden and destroyed. The levelling of the graves of Germans and other aggressors as well as their collaborators was decreed by a document of the federal Ministry of Internal Affairs dated 18 May 1945 and by a transcript issued by the Minister of Internal Affairs of Slovenia, Zoran Polič, dated 12 June 1945. The issue of the Home Guard members was initiated in political circles by Edvard Kocbek in 1947, yet he was reassured that they were submitted to “reeducation”. His interview on the subject published in the magazine *Zaliv* in Trieste in 1975 was considered controversial. Kocbek wrote of the executions of Home Guard members and was severely criticised by Slovene politicians. In her essay “Guilt and Sin” published in 1984 (Kocbek Proceedings) Spomenka Hribar points out to the issue of national reconciliation and makes way for a public, reverential memory of the Home Guard victims. The issue, however, has not yet been resolved, although various representatives of the State, Church and political parties have frequently expressed their views and strivings for national reconciliation. The killing of the Home Guard members has remained a dividing issue among the Slovenes even after the reconciliatory celebration at the mass burial ground Pod Krenom in Kočevski Rog on 8 July 1990 attended by several ten thousand people, including the highest representatives of the Slovene political and public life. Such divisions were felt also in the parliamentary discussions when the Bill on war burial grounds was passed in June 2003. The Bill should be able to settle the issue of war and post-war burial grounds including Home Guard victims as well as victims of revolutionary violence during and after the War.

Legislation on war burial-grounds

There are 3,811 graves and burial-grounds in Slovenia, 114 of them dating back to the First World War, 3,694 to the Second World War and 3 to other wars. The burial-grounds comprise ca. 18,000 buried persons, most of them from the First World War period (over 86,000). However, apart from the Slovenes, the number includes persons of various nationalities that were killed in the territory of Slovenia. 2,707 burial-grounds out of 3,694 from the Second World War are graves of members of the National Liberation Army and 942 are graves of victims of war.⁷ However, the official numbers of cemeteries, burial-grounds, graves and victims do not include either those that were not able or not allowed to have a grave of their own or those burial-ground that are designated as hidden.

In the twelve years of independence or even in a somewhat longer period in which the issue of these burial-grounds could have touched each Slovene, Slovenia has been unable to initiate a systematic collecting of data on hidden burial-grounds.⁸ The issue was more actively dealt with by the State – at least in a declarative manner – in the autumn of 2001, when the public was flooded by commentaries on discovered burial-grounds in Crngrob, Lancovo and Slovenska Bistrica, and the question was legitimately raised as to when the State would acquire a list of hidden burial-grounds as well as when and how it would begin to set them up (arrange them). After the debate the Government committed itself that that state institutions would undertake everything in order for the burial-grounds to be discovered, marked and the remains of victims buried, where necessary.⁹

How the co-operation of the Ministry of Culture in registering hidden burial-grounds took place

The beginnings of registering go back to the year 2000. During the debate over the Act on the privatisation of cultural monuments in the so-called collective “social property”, the State Council [Parliament] passed two decrees, one of which suggested to the Government of the RS that the Commission for the Solution of Hidden Burial-grounds¹⁰ prepare a list of mass burial-grounds as a basis on which the Government would prepare declarations of monuments of national significance.

Those of us who dealt with historical monuments and their declaration were aware that such a decree by the State Council posed a potential threat as well. Considering the fact that there was no register of existing burial-grounds and they were not even taken care of, the possibility existed that unverified, uninvestigated and unconfirmed locations would be declared cultural monuments of national significance.

It was clear that the declaration of a certain burial-ground as a cultural monument should only be the final stage of setting up or restoring a location. First it had to be established whether each individual location was a burial-ground or not. The initial step could only be followed by entering the location into the register of war burial-grounds, making sure it was taken care of and possibly declaring it a cultural monument. The Monument Protection Service has already faced similar phenomena and pressures in dealing with the historical heritage of the Second World War period.

When we, the members of the commission, realised there was no real chance for the Ministry of Labour to perform the registering (due to their personal and technical incapability, refusal of competence until the Bill on war burial-grounds be passed, etc.), members of the Commission by their own free will prepared a list in the spring of 2000. We suggested that the gap between the demands of the State Council, between the desires and tasks of the Commission, between the practice and the professional principles valid in the monument protection service (Ministry of Culture) and between the present state of preparation of the topography and the set-up of burial-grounds (Ministry of Labour) be solved by the Commission or a group of its members investigating all (or a prior selection of) the burial-grounds and preparing a list of them. Between January and June 2000 the work was performed by: two members of the Commission, Tine Velikonja (president of *Nova slovenska zaveza* [New Slovene Covenant]) and Dr. Mitja Ferenc (Ministry of Culture, Cultural Heritage Office) and also Mateja Bavdaž (Ministry of Culture, Cultural Heritage Office). Occasionally other members of the Commission (e.g. its president Viktor Blažič) took part in our effort. The work was performed within the Ministry of Culture, since the Commission had no material or technical resources for such a project. After a few months, the work was interrupted in June 2000, since the new Government of Dr. Andrej Bajuk replaced the president of the Commission and a few members. The new leadership¹¹ had different views and methods of work, while the author of this article, despite the efforts of the former president, was no longer its member and leader of the registering team.¹² A year later – in June 2001 – the Government of Dr. Drnovšek formed a new Commission of the Government of RS for the Issue of Hidden Burial-grounds. The seven tasks of this Commission began with “registering the data on the number and location of burial-grounds of members of the defeated side in the Second World War – the established register should subsequently serve for the standardisation of the burial-grounds.” The preparation of the register thus became one of the main tasks of the Commission.¹³

Knowing the system of registering the cultural heritage with the Ministry of Culture and its Cultural Heritage Office and making allowances for the technical capabilities of their INDOK Centre as well as the fact that no funds were intended for the project in the budget, it seemed most appropriate that the project be initiated within the Ministry of Culture. Why so?

For several years, now, the Cultural Heritage Office has been operating a computerised data base of the Cultural Heritage Register,¹⁴ into which over 16,000 items of the cultural heritage have been entered. The methodology developed by the Cultural Heritage Office seemed the most appropriate and available basis for the future topography of hidden burial-grounds. Introduction new methodologies, new ways of working, searching for new contractors or budget funds would prolong the work and increase the required funds, demand more tenders, longer appointed time etc. From a realistic point of view, such a project executed within the framework of the state administration could only begin to be carried out within the Cultural Heritage Office due to its methodology and available technical preconditions. The Ministry of Culture therefore decided to develop the project within its framework for the period of one year, i.e. with its staff as well as funds and technical support.

Principles for the preparation of the project of registering hidden burial-grounds in the Republic of Slovenia

The basic guideline of the project was the preparation of evidence and a register of hidden burial-grounds which would be supported with maps, photographs and documents. The project was planned to take place within the state administration and with the existing experts and funds employing the standard methodology. It would possess results which would enable the State to pass the decisions for erecting memorial signs and guidelines for the development of the burial-grounds. It was to facilitate the continuation of work and form a basis for the Ministry of Labour, when the required experts and

technical resources were available. It was further to be beneficial to other state institutions – the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of the Environment, district attorneys, courts (in making decisions for interventions in cases of excavations and trial excavations), the media, the investigators etc. The appointed time being very limited, the work was undertaken gradually: individual burial-grounds were not investigated into details; instead, the basic data were collected for as many locations as possible. The definition of each location by means of satellite navigation was of primary importance, since it was the basis for further digital and cartographic charts and for defining the cadastral data, the photographic documentation and a precise description of the access routes. The preparing of evidence was difficult and specific, since the individual locations of burial-grounds had to be discovered, their size determined and the number of possible victims estimated. The fact that the written documents on post-war killings were scarce and those on the locations of the burial-grounds almost non-existent was hardly any help. Oral testimonies, though, proved helpful in the search for data, apart from the literature, newspapers, minutes of district interrogation commissions, minutes of the interrogation commissions of the State Council (i.e. those lead by Pučnik and Polajnar), the archive of the New Slovene Covenant, the archives of district attorneys, the archives of the police administration, the cadastre of the Caving Association of Slovenia as well as private archives. Despite the fact that a critical distance should be maintained, especially to oral sources, the memorial inscriptions and statements of direct witnesses were almost the only clues that led to the locations.¹⁵ Since the State has undertaken no systematic investigation – trial excavation – it is impossible with certainty to confirm or reject individual recorded locations.

Reports on the examinations and technical matters

In co-operation with people familiar with individual burial-grounds, and also with criminal investigators, presidents and members of former district investigation commissions for the investigation of post-war mass killings, relatives of the victims and others, Dr. Mitja Ferenc and Mateja Bavdaž processed 390 locations of burial-grounds in the period between March 2002–February 2003 and September 2003–October 2004¹⁷ using the standard methodology.¹⁶ 998 photographic and orthophotographic charts were prepared, 3,400 photographs were taken, ca. 2,800 sketches, maps, photographs and other documents were made/taken, transferred and ordered, 295 maps with plot numbers were made as well as numerous audio and video recordings. Identification data were given for each burial-ground, a description was made including the marks for its positioning and classification, the location was defined as well as the sources, literature, photographs, etc.¹⁸ The project was supposed to be completed in 2004, but additional 160 locations appeared on the list for investigation and processing, and even more are expected to emerge.¹⁹

Let us point out a document which was discovered in the summer of 2004 and is the first document known so far testifying that the post-war government kept a detailed record of the hidden burial-grounds in the territory of Slovenia. This document, pertaining to the district of Ilirska Bistrica, contained a list of 120 locations with data on owners, plot names, number of victims and the state of the burial-grounds in that area alone. A fifth of the locations were checked with the owners and they all confirmed the existence of the burial-grounds and gave leads to several new ones.²⁰ After the discovery of this document, it is increasingly difficult to estimate the final number of hidden burial-grounds in the territory of Slovenia. It is possible that only half of them are known so far.

Outline of computer processing

1) Identification

Characterisation: serial number of entry.

IRN: registration number of the items in the Collective Cultural Heritage Register. Some burial-grounds have already been entered in the Register kept by the Cultural Heritage Office of the Republic of Slovenia.

Name of burial-ground: consisting of the name of the settlement in the area of which the burial-ground is located and the name of the place defining the location.

Synonyms: other names of the burial-ground traced in sources and literature.

2) Description of burial-ground

A brief description (a sentence or two) and a somewhat longer description (usually ca. 10 lines) give data on the historical events: who, when, how many. Most changes will take place here, since new discoveries, trial excavations, new testimonies etc. produce new insights.

The type of burial-ground will classify the locations as to the type of land on which it is located: meadow, field, embankment, orchard, area along a brook, forest, lime-pit, quarry, mound, sinkhole, clearing, refuse pit, pond, urban area etc.

The entry describes the type of victims that appear in sources: e.g. Croatian civilians, Slovene Home Guard, Ustasha, the Home Guard wounded etc.

The category of nationality will facilitate a classification of burial-grounds and their victims according to nationality (Germans, Italians, Romanies, Slovenes etc.)

The victim status will facilitate a classification of burial-grounds according to who is buried there: civilians, soldiers, both, not known.

The marking will show how many burial-grounds are marked and how many are not.

3) Location

The third group of data includes information on the locations of the burial-grounds. Each location defined by satellite belongs to the area pertaining to the settlement, while each settlement pertains to a certain district. The centroid indicates the central point in case the area is delineated and not the location itself. Slovenia is divided into a net of charts to various scales. Mateja Bavdaž and I entered the names here to the scale of 1:5,000 and 1:25,000. One brief and one longer description of the location follow with indications of the position of burial-grounds. If a burial-ground is located in a karst ravine, the basic data are entered on the ravine, on the state of the burial-ground and an opinion on the credibility or on what should be undertaken in order to establish the existence of the mortal remains with greater certainty. The chapter Description of access routes in which an attempt was made to describe the access to each burial-ground is very important. The descriptions are more extensive in the case of burial-grounds which are difficult to access.

The TTN outline of the location and the orthophotographic outline indicate that each map was scanned cartographically as well as with aerial photography (orthophotography) to the scale of 1:5,000.

4. Sources and literature

This category comprises the sources and literature on each burial-ground and the events associated with it.

5. Photographs

Each location and everything associated with the burial-ground (its state, marks, photographs, documents) were also photographed. Selected photographs and documents were scanned and entered into a computer application. Each photograph is accompanied with a description, date when it was taken and the name of the person who took it.

6. Notes

This category includes the dates of register entries, dates of field surveys and the names of the persons that took part in them.

7. Cadastre

This category includes data on plot numbers, on the cadastral district and the cadastral office. This group of data was subsequently included (in February 2004), after the Bill on war burial-grounds was passed, since it anticipated such contents for the register. Apart from that, the outlines of the locations to a smaller scale, mostly 1:1,000 and 1:2,000, are entered into plot forms.

8. Oral testimonies

This category was subsequently included into the application. Since various data originated from persons who wished to remain anonymous, only their initials were entered into the previous records. This category, however, includes their full names and addresses. The category is therefore at this point not intended yet for the public.

9. Prints

The data entered can be printed in various forms (in full form, as a brief description or as a list of burial-grounds according to districts, in alphabetical order or according to their serial numbers, etc.)

In the beginning the calculations were that there were ca. 120–150 potential hidden burial grounds located in Slovenia. However, now it seems that the country is more criss-crossed by burial-grounds than was anticipated. 390 recorded burial-grounds pertain to 86 districts, which means that every second or third district in Slovenia has one or more of them in its territory. Some of them are exceptional as to number of graves. It should, however, be pointed out that some areas were more thoroughly investigated than others due to more relevant informers or more existing documents on them. The districts afflicted with the most numerous hidden burial-grounds are Celje, Škofja Loka and Ljubljana, as well as Mislinja, Radovljica, Prebold, Kamnik and Ajdovščina.

Burial-grounds and their locations

On the basis of the locations chosen for the killings, the burial-grounds can be divided into four groups: the karst ravines, mineshafts including shelters, antitank trenches and ditches, and regular holes that had to be dug for the killings.

Members of the Caving Society discovered and recorded finds of human bones in 80 karst caves out of 8,000 contained in the register. 23 Considering the fact that they dared not write about such finds in the post-war period while their interest and knowledge on the caves and human remains varied, the appointed number is only an approximation but according to experts it exceeds 100. Human bones are further discovered in already registered caves where their existence was known, yet not recorded. Most human remains disintegrated over the given period of time; they were covered by leaves, soil or stones, or they were exhumed. Some caves were purposefully levelled or transformed into refuse pits; in some cases the remains are not discernible, yet there are traces in the vicinity indicating that the caves are actually burial-grounds. Traces of killings in the caves that served as mass burial-grounds were usually hidden by mining the access to the cave. In some cases the explosion pulled down only part of the entry, in others the entry collapsed entirely. Such is the case of the most famous hidden burial-grounds in Kočevski Rog: Jama pod Macesnovo Gorico and Jama Pod Krenom, where the reconciliatory celebration took place in 1990.²⁴ Human mortal remains were hardly ever exhumed from karst caves. Partial excavation and exhumation of the mortal remains took place only in nine caves in the districts of Koper and Sežana: in Mihova Jama pri Uršnih Selih and Jama Bršljinka in 1992. The bones exhumed by cavers from three ravines on the plateau of Trnovska Planota were investigated by the district commission, ascertained as being human and subsequently returned to the cave. A more thorough investigation was carried out by the police in Jama za Vrtecem (Spodnja Lipnica), where, however, the surmised identity was not confirmed by DNA tests, and in Brezno pri Konfinu I nad Glažuto, which is, due to Dr. Lovro Šturm and his assistants, the most thoroughly investigated location so far.

The second group of hidden burial-grounds are mineshafts and huge chasms caused by their sinking. The most famous mineshaft is that of St. Barbara in Huda Jama near Laško. The preparation for the cost estimates and the estimates of the technical conditions for the demolition of four partitions in the mineshaft took place already during the initial examination. At the same time the renovation of part of a filled gallery and the access to two 40- to 50-metre deep shafts presumably containing mortal remains, too, was ordered. However, the notorious mineshaft has still not undergone thorough investigation.²⁵ Other mineshafts mentioned are: Krištandol near Hrastnik, the abandoned mine of Pečovnik near Celje as well as mine chasms on the Gorice hill above Šoštanj. It is assumed that most victims are hidden in the mine chasms of Stari Hrastnik, especially those of Serbian nationality (executed after 20 May 1945) and of Slovene nationality (executed at the beginning of June, most probably in the nights between 2 and

8 June 1945). No excavations have taken place in the mines and mine chasms so far, while the locations and events from Stari Hrastnik were described by three victims who escaped either from the killing grounds or on the way to them. This group also includes prepared shelters or bunkers that were used as burial-grounds (e.g. Slovenska Bistrica, Krško, Spodnje Radvanje).

The third group of hidden burial-grounds are antitank trenches and other already existing ditches. The most thoroughly investigated example is the antitank trench and mass burial-ground in Tezno pri Mariboru. This is probably the largest burial-ground in the territory of Slovenia, perhaps even in Europe. The victims, except perhaps a small number of them, were not Slovene citizens. During motorway construction over the trench, part of it was systematically surveyed, while the rest was left untouched. Another larger burial-ground, a few kilometres long, was in the Celje antitank trench reaching from Teharje to the primary school at Golovec. A minor part of the trench was surveyed in 1997. An area 420 cm long and 150 cm deep revealed 40 skeletons. All of them except 3 were male, probably members of the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia.²⁶ The coincidental excavation from the former antitank trench near the Klugec restaurant in Celje, where the remains of over 30 people were discovered in August 1996, belongs to the same category.²⁷ No other surveys took place except some trial excavations in filled ditches in Medlog near Celje, which, however, failed to confirm the existence of a burial-ground.²⁸ Another known antitank trench is the one that crossed the plain between the river Sava and the Dobrovo road near Brežice and Dobrovo. A larger trench filled with corpses lies near Bistrica na Sotli. An antitank trench used as a burial-ground is located along the road and the railway near Mislinja and Slovenj Gradec. The trench of the Rupnik line near Radovljica was also used for the same purpose.

The fourth group of hidden burial-grounds, and most numerous one, comprises regular holes that had to be dug out for killings. They are scattered all over Slovenia. It is difficult to establish where their density is the greatest, since their number varies due to the extent to which the area has been surveyed. However, the surveys carried out so far indicate that the greatest number of hidden burial-grounds is located in the regions of Štajersko (in the vicinity of Celje), of Gorenjsko, in the areas of Slovenj Gradec and Mislinja and also Kamnik. Most of them were dug in thin woods, in clearings or on wooded edges of meadows. They can be found at all kinds of location: in places where ponds, refuse pits, car parks were subsequently set up, in orchards, along the outer cemetery walls, on river banks, along brooks, on steep hillsides, even next to chapels. Some burial-grounds were revealed by natural forces (e.g. the flooding of the river Lahomščica), other by coincidence during building excavations (e.g. the building of Slovenijales in Medlog) or by searches of individuals and associations (e.g. in Gornji Suhor). Only few of them were discovered systematically (e.g. on Zaplana – Zakovski gozd pod Strmico; v Strelcu – Jelenca). The burial-grounds of German and Italian soldiers are an exception, and their exhumations take place continuously according to agreements with the two countries in question. The former are transferred to one of the three cemeteries in Slovenia: in Kranj, Celje and Ljubljana, while the latter are transferred to Italy to Redipuglia.

Burial-grounds and their time of origin, the nationality and status of the victims

Most mass killings in Slovenia took place between May and July 1945, especially executions of returned Home Guard members and prisoners of war or those seized in Slovenia as well as prisoners from other regions of Yugoslavia. Subsequently there were mass killings until January 1946, mostly of Germans, Italians as well as those Slovenes that were suspected of collaboration with the enemy and anti-communism. However, individual secret executions took place even after that.

The registering included not only the burial-grounds of post-war killings, but all the hidden burial-grounds, including those from the war period as well as those of victims of final battles that were not accounted for or were even unknown. Following the Act on war burial-grounds, the few burial-grounds that were dug up during the war or where the mortal remains were partly exhumed and buried elsewhere (e.g. from the karst ravines in the area of Koper to the Koper cemetery²⁹) were also recorded.

The so-called war burial-grounds include e.g. those in Krimška Jama, Žiglovica nad Ribnico, Grič pri Klevevžu, Čužnja Vas and Iška Vas from 1942. Another larger group of burial-grounds can be dated as originating from the period between September and October 1943, after the capitulation of Italy. They are connected with executions and killings of seized Home Guard members and Chetnics as well as some civilians. This group includes the burial-grounds on Travná Gora, in Mačkovec, Mozelj and also Jelendol

and Bavdle pri Grčaricah – i.e. transferred graves. The burial-grounds originating from 1944 include those in Gorenja Trebuša (Makceva Grapa, Podgrivška Grapa, Petrova Grapa) and Lajše pri Cerknem, while the burial-grounds in Zakriž pri Cerknem, Lokve, etc. date back to the winter of 1945.

It would seem that the number of burial-grounds with persons of non-Slovene nationality exceeded the number of those of Slovene nationality. The Second World War in Europe ended in Slovenia and numerous enemy armies fighting on the side of the German armed forces with several accompanying civilians ended up in the territory of Slovenia. Fearful of the Yugoslav army they intended to break through to Austria and Italy and wanted to surrender to the British and the Americans. Despite numerous “death marches” through former Yugoslav provinces, where the returned and seized soldiers and civilians ended, most of them were buried in the territory of Slovenia.

The number of burial-grounds with armed members and civilians from the Independent State of Croatia is, according to the locations recorded so far, only slightly smaller than that of the Slovenes. Withdrawing from Croatia across the territory of Slovenia, their journey mostly ended already at Bistrica ob Sotli, Krakovski Gozd near Kostanjevica na Krki (Sajeve) and in the vicinity of Krško (Mrtvice, Hafnerjev Graben). Some reached Celje and in its vicinity. A large number of them ended on their way from Velenje to Dravograd: in the vicinity of Gornji Dolič, in the valley of Mislinjska Dolina and in the vicinity of Slovenj Gradec. They can also be found in Kamnik (Cuzakov Travnik), Kamniška Bistrica (Macesnovc, Šimnov Plaz, Kraljev Hrib, Kopišča, Dolski Plac), Podgorje and Sidol. It seems that the Croats were also buried in two mineshafts of St. Barbara in Huda Jama. Those who were returned from Koroško/Kärnten in the middle of May 1945, ended either in the burial-grounds in Zgoranja Lipnica near Radovljica (Lancovo) or in Crngrob and primarily in Kočevski Rog. They could probably be found in the antitank trench near Dobova (Mostec). However, the largest burial-ground of the Croats is in Tezenski Gozd. 1,179 bodies were excavated in April 1999 only from a 70 metre part of the trench across which the motorway was subsequently built.

The returned or seized soldiers of Serbian or Montenegrin nationality (Chetnics, Serbian Volunteer Corps, Serbian National Guard) were supposedly shot in Kočevski Rog, in the vicinity of Kamnik, and on the mountain ridge of Pohorje, yet the precise locations are still unknown. Part of the Chetnics seized in the vicinity of Laško were buried in the mine chasms of Stari Hrastnik.

Most locations with German soldiers known so far are in the vicinity of Ilirska Bistrica, where 1,347 persons were presumably buried in at least 120 burial-grounds. The burial-grounds in the Gorenjsko/Upper Carniola region include those in Mošnje (Zgoša, Senožeta, Lisičji Rep), Križe pri Trziču, Kranjska Gora (Savsko Naselje), Kočna, Goriče, perhaps also in Begunje (Mazovčev Pruh) and Mojstrana (Mlačca). Some burial-grounds are in the karst ravines in the Primorsko/Littoral region, e.g. in Bukovje (Brezen v Martinovih Hrastnicah), Divača (Kačna Jama), Obrovo (Kaserova Jama), Slope (Jama pod Kotarjevo Ogrado).

Some of the Slovene Home Guard members who were returned from Austria through Področca were imprisoned in the Škofja Loka Castle and later taken to various locations in the vicinity in smaller groups: to Pevno (Matjaževa Jama), Trnje (Podtrnj), Gabrovo (Lovrenška Grapa), Bodovlje, etc., while most of them were taken to the central camp in Šentvid and from there to the karst caves of Kočevski Rog. It is believed that most of them were buried in Jama pod Macesnovo Gorico. A minor part of them ended in Golo, perhaps in Brezarjevo Brezno in Podutik or the nearby Kucja Dolina. In the case of this burial-ground, the preparations for trial excavations and a possible excavation were well under way, but the actual works were never carried out. The wounded Home Guard members seized at the end of the War probably ended in the ravines above Glažuta (Brezno pri Konfinu I), Iška (Koščevo Brezno) and Iška Vas. Those that were returned from Austria through Pliberk/Bleiburg and Teharje were to a large extent taken to the mine chasms of Stari Hrastnik and its vicinity.

Most of the other massive burial-grounds of Slovene civilians are located in the vicinity of OZNA camps (Strnišče, Hrastovec in Slovenske Gorice, Brestrnica, etc.) or in its district prisons. Some citizens of Šoštanj supposedly ended in Gorice above Šoštanj. Apart from Croats and the Kočevje/Gottscheer Germans, local people of Posavje are buried on 13 recorded locations in Marija Reka (Kregarjev Graben and Knezdol) as well as citizens of Celje in Košnica. Local people from the villages around Logatec probably lie in the local ravines (Brezno na Repišah, Jama Gradišnica, Šemonovo Brezno, Zakovski Gozd pod Strmco). People from Idrija were probably taken to Jelični Vrh (Brusova Grapa). Part of the civilians transferred by force from the Koroško/Kärnten were executed in Leše near Prevalje. Civilians from Maribor were taken to the killing grounds on the mountain ridge of Pohorje. In Zgoranja Bistrica they

were "buried" as late as the beginning of 1946. In August 2001 and February 2002, 431 skeletons were excavated from two shafts or shelters.

The ravines on the plateau of Trnovski gozd in the Primorsko region (Trnovo – Zalesnika, Voglarji – Brezno za Cvetrežem, Grgar – Brezno Podgomila) contain primarily persons who were arrested by the Yugoslav authorities in the area of Gorica/Gorizia, Ajdovščina, while the ravines in the vicinity of Idrijski Log (Ajharjevo Brezno, Andrejčkovo Brezno) probably hide those that were transferred to the Primorsko region after their withdrawal from Gorica/Gorizia. Persons from Trst/Trieste and the area of Koper were also driven to the karst caves.³⁰

Marking of burial-grounds

The set up or, rather, the marking of the surveyed locations varies. Hardly any burial-ground was properly taken care of. Only 118 locations are equipped with signs and marked, while 227 locations remain unmarked. In most cases the locations are at various sites and plots: unmarked ravines, meadows, moors, woods, chasms, riverbanks, etc. At some locations or in their vicinity various signs have been erected by different societies, district commissions and individuals, especially relatives. The signs are almost exclusively made of wood and vary in form from crosses made by two boards nailed together at a right angle to each other to larger, thicker, more durable signs that were designed. Those erected at the beginning of the 1990s have almost decayed. Consequently more durable signs were erected, in some places as much as memorial chapels, e.g. in Marija Reka or at the St. Barbara shaft in Huda Jama.³¹

The vicinity of burial-grounds was further treated only in a few cases. The first developments go back to 1990 when all four burial-grounds in Kočevski Rog were fenced in. There were two reasons for this: the fences prevented the visitors from sliding into the ravines and at the same time indicated that access to them is not advisable or even permitted out of reverence. Apart from the cross erected there, an area made of stone for lighting candles was set up. Dustbins were provided for with greater or lesser taste. The burial-grounds on Trnovska Planota were developed in a similar way: Zalesnika, Podgomila and Za Cvetrežem. With the exception of crosses erected or built, there were no further developments. Lajše is an exception, being the future central burial-ground and memorial for the Primorsko region. Civilians were executed there in 1944 out of revenge for the severe failure of the communist school in Cerkno. A memorial chapel was built there, and a path to the edge of the wood paved with granite. Stations of the Cross were marked, and large signs erected, while the access route to the ravine was expanded and a monument with memorial plaques erected in front of it.

In view of the fact that most burial-grounds are still unknown, there are hardly any signposts indicating access to them. Only the four burial-grounds in Kočevski Rog have signposts that were erected after the reconciliatory celebration there twelve years ago and there are signposts for the three above mentioned burial-grounds on Trnovska Planota as well as one for Teharje.

The final stage in restoring a burial-ground is its declaration as a cultural monument. Only two locations have been declared cultural monuments: Brezarjevo brezno from which the mortal remains were exhumed as early as June 1945 and the near-by Kucja Dolina where they were transferred and buried.

It is possible that too much energy as well as funds have been devoted to merely two symbolic places over all these years, the two locations that are to symbolise hidden burial-grounds: the Teharje memorial park and the chapel Pod Krenom in Kočevski Rog. Nevertheless, we have failed to present ourselves as an organised state. What I have in mind is the costs for the improvement of the still unfinished monument and the development of a golf course above the graves in Teharje. In the case of Jama Pod Krenom, the memorial structure selected in a public tender was overtaken by an illegal building which was erected more rapidly. In addition, various other interventions have entirely transformed or rather depreciated the original appearance of this most famous burial-ground in Slovenia. Hundreds of other burial-grounds, on the other hand, have not even been discussed yet, nor their development planned or their purpose defined.

In December 2002 a project submitted by Gigo design from Ljubljana was selected in a public tender for a uniform marking of the burial-grounds. The sign is designed as an erect cylinder; it is cast in bronze and set up on a concrete base. The cylinder is part of an internal mechanism that facilitates its ringing when it is swung. A concrete cylinder of the same dimensions as the concrete base is designed as a plaque for candles and flowers. The first monument of this type was erected on 22 December 2003 near the

ravine Zalesnik in Trnovski Gozd. Another three were erected a few days before 1 November 2004: at Glažuta (Brezno pri Konfinu I), in Kočevski Rog (Jama pod Macesnovo Gorico) and in Zgornja Bistrica (Grobišče pri Rovu A). The State plans to set up five to ten monuments annually, which means that the whole process will take over 20 years to complete.

The Act on war burial-grounds suggests that only the basic data be written on each monument: a dedication or a memorial text, apart from the identification data and time and place of death.³³ However, the memorial sign selected in the tender anticipates the place and time of the burial-ground, the number of victims, their nationality, the coordinates as well as an inscription.

The issue of reliability

It is impossible to give the exact numbers of victims without more systematic investigations, while it is somewhat less difficult to state the nationality of the victims, although the data for many recorded locations are either varied, excluding each other or even nonexistent. In numerous cases the sources indicate the nationality and even an estimate of the number of victims, yet not for individual burial-grounds.

The issue of provability, reliability, confirmation that the location is actually a burial-ground is therefore one of the most pressing issues in recording hidden burial-grounds, since there is no evidence that all the recorded sites are actual burial-grounds. Above all, the range of each burial-ground is not known. The extent of reliability can only be estimated on the basis of oral testimonies, collected documentation, transformed terrain at the location, while the existence of a burial-ground cannot be confirmed with certainty or defined more specifically.³⁴ The methods and procedures of physical examination have yet not been undertaken by the State, except in some special cases.³⁵ Almost all the excavations carried out so far were the result of the interest of others. The investigations were initiated either by the district (as in the case of Zgornja Bistrica, the karst ravines in the district of Koper), by the Motorway Company of the RS – from now on DARS (in Tezno), by a private individual, relative, a society or district commission (Zgornja Hudinja, Špitalič na Celjskem, Suhor in Bela Krajina, Jelovica) or there were some coincidental finds (the restaurant Klukec in Celje). Trial excavations in Medlog near Celje were also carried out by DARS on account of the access to the motorway planned across the presumed burial-grounds. However, it seems that mortal remains are not supposed to be exhumed in the future, with the exception of the so-called sanitary removals.

Considering the fact that international conventions and basic human rights were severely violated, the exhumation, identification and burial of victims wherever possible are an obligation of the State. However, on the basis of our sparse experiences with exhumation, it should be known that more accurate data are hardly to be expected. The number and sex of the victims can usually be established, only seldom their status, and even less their nationality. Due to the specific characteristics of hidden burial-grounds and the mortal remains in them, great results cannot be anticipated, not even by identification by means of biologically comparable material (DNA).³⁶ So far only one person has been successfully identified according to this method: the skeleton of a male killed in the woods on Jelovica in 1943. On the basis of a DNA test of his tooth, his son and daughter could bury their father who had been missing for over fifty years.³⁷ On account of hiding the crimes and burial-grounds in many locations (several of them were transformed into refuse pits), their existence will undoubtedly have to be confirmed by trial excavations before they can be delineated and after that properly restored.

Notes

1 The Repatriations from Austria in 1945. Cowgill Inquiry, London 1990, p. 299.

2 For more on this subject see: Boris Mlakar: Slovensko domobranstvo: 1942–1945. Ustanovitev, organizacija, idejno ozadje, Ljubljana 2003 and the bibliography, and also Tone Ferenc: "Povojne množične usmrtnice 1945–46", Enciklopedija Slovenije, Vol. 16, Dodatek, Ljubljana 2002, pp. 166, 167.

3 The executions were mostly directed against fascists and collaborators, particularly members of the military, paramilitary and police units symbolising the fascist state. Apart from them, numerous civilians were arrested and members of the Italian Liberation Movement and other persons that either rejected the communist ideology or opposed the territorial annexation to Yugoslavia. For more see the texts by Nevenka Troha and Nataša Nemeč.

4 The highest estimates reach up to 600,000 people; John Prcela, Dražen Živić: Hrvatski holokaust, Zagreb 2001, p. 110. The Croatian

- demographer V. Žerjavič calculated that ca. 49,000 Croatian Ustaša, Home Guard members and civilians were executed. However, not all of them were executed in Slovenia; Vladimir Žerjavič, *Opsesije I megalomanije oko Jasenovca I Bleiburga*, Zagreb 1992; Vladimir Žerjavič, *Gubici stanovništva Jugoslavije u drugom svjetskom ratu*, Jugoslavensko viktimološko društvo, Zagreb 1989.
- 5 Among them 27,118 were casualties from among the Partisans, 26,143 civilians were victims of the terror of the aggressor, 10,460 were mobilised into foreign armies, 188 were casualties of the Royal Army of Yugoslavia, 94 were casualties in European resistance movements and 80 in the Allied military forces.
- 6 Tadeja Tominšek-Rihtar, Mojca Šorn, "Žrtve druge svetovne vojne in zaradi nje (april 1941–januar 1946)", *Posvet Žrtve vojne in revolucije*, Državni svet [State Council], Ljubljana, 11 & 12 November 2004.
- 7 Ministrstvo za delo, družino in socialne zadeve [Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs], "Informacija o stanju na področju vojnih grobišč za sejo Vlade RS", 29/7/1999. The numbers appearing in official data are even higher.
- 8 It should be pointed out that the issue was dealt with by persons and societies outside the official institutions of the State even at the beginning of the 1990s, mostly by the journalist and publicist Ivo Žajdela and the Društvo za ureditev zamočenih grobov [Society for the Regulation of Hidden Burial-grounds]. District commissions were established in several district authorities at the beginning of the 1990s, and they performed their task with various degrees of success; most of them backed out early in the process, or they dealt mostly with the circumstances of the executions and less with searching for and marking the actual locations or confirming their accuracy.
- 9 "Izjava Vlade RS ob celovitem načrtu ureditve grobišč množičnih pobojev ter ob sprejemanju zakona o vojnih grobiščih" ["Statement of the Government of the RS on the comprehensive plan for the development of burial-grounds of post-war mass killings and on the passing of the Bill on war burial-grounds"], 22/11/2001.
- 10 On its establishment, the Commission was named Komisija Vlade RS za reševanje vprašanj, povezanih z namembnostjo in ureditvijo grobišč v Kočevskem rogu [Commission of the RS for the Solution of Issues Associated with the Purpose and Regulation of Burial-grounds in Kočevski Rog]. On 13 December of the same year, the name acquired the addition "and other burial-grounds of the same kind"; Arhiv Komisije, "Sklepa o ustanovitvi in dopolnitvi".
- 11 The name of the Commission was also changed into Komisija Vlade RS za evidentiranje in označitev prikritih grobišč [Commission of the RS for Recording and Marking Hidden Burial-grounds]; "Sklep Vlade RS", 9. seja, 27/7/2000. The recording of hidden burial-grounds is for the first time named a task of the Commission.
- 12 A letter of Tine Velikonja to the author of this paper, 15/9/2000; public letter of Spomenka Hribar to Dr. Andrej Bajuk, Delo, 30/9/2000, a letter of a member of the Commission Viktor Blažič, "Grobovi tulijo", Delo, 7/10/2000.
- 13 "Sklep o ustanovitvi Komisije Vlade Republike Slovenije za reševanje vprašanj prikritih grobišč", 33. seja Vlade RS, 21 June 2001. Further tasks of the Commission were: to prepare a concrete plan of activities for appropriate protection and maintenance of the burial-grounds until the pertaining Bill be passed; to express considerations on issues associated with the existing and newly discovered burial-grounds and graves of mass killings; co-operation in the procedure of acquiring the preliminary design for the marking of all burial-grounds of the same variety in Slovenia; current supervision of the building of the Teharje Memorial Park and the chapel in Kočevski rog, Pod Krenom; passing suggestions and initiatives associated with the regulation and development of the burial-grounds to the Government; and raising funds for those purposes.
- 14 "Pravilnik o vodenju Zbirnega registra kulturne in naravne dediščine"; Uradni list RS [RS Official Gazette], No. 26/95.
- 15 At this point I wish to especially emphasise the work of criminal investigators and the police, especially the leader of the Reconciliation group, namely the chief inspector Pavel Jamnik. Investigating evidence in the form of conversations equipped with official comments, they have established a historical source significant for the reconstruction of the investigated events, especially for more accurate confirmation of the recorded hidden burial-grounds. The collected evidence that we were allowed to read is of great significance since hardly any relevant documents exist.
- 16 The computer application was prepared by Ksenija Kovačec-Naglič from the Ministrstvo za kulturo [Ministry of Culture], Center INDOK URSKD [head of the INDOK Centre of the Cultural Heritage Office].
- 17 A year later, the recording was continued in August 2003 when an agreement was reached by the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Culture on co-operation in the registering of the hidden burial-grounds in Slovenia.
- 18 Mitja Ferenc, Mateja Bavdaž, "Evidentiranje prikritih grobišč v RS", reference materials, October 2003.
- 19 Mitja Ferenc, Mateja Bavdaž, "Evidentiranje prikritih grobišč v RS", state of affairs in October 2004.
- 20 Mitja Ferenc, "The graves are levelled and overgrown." ("Seznam grobov sovražnikovih vojakov padlih iz časa 2. svetovne vojne na območju občine Ilirska Bistrica"), *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1/2000, pp. 160–168.
- 21 The computer application was prepared by Ksenija Kovačec-Naglič from the Ministrstvo za kulturo [Ministry of Culture], Center INDOK URSKD [head of the INDOK Centre of the Cultural Heritage Office].
- 22 Mitja Ferenc, Mateja Bavdaž, "Evidentiranje prikritih grobišč v RS", reference materials, October 2003.
- 23 The cadastre is kept by the Jamarska zveza Slovenije [Caving Association of Slovenia] together with the Inštitut za raziskovanje krasa ZRC SAZU [Institute for the Research of Karst]. The cadastre of caves consists of basic data usually taken on the occasion of the first investigation of the cave (cadastral number, name, location, coordinates, descriptions and data on the first investigators, and a plan of the cave). Now the registration records are supplemented with additional records, plans, photographs etc.
- 24 For further information on karst caves – burial-grounds see: Andrej Mihevc, *Množična grobišča v jamah v Sloveniji*, Vol. V, *Brez Milosti: Ranjeni, invalidni in bolni povojni ujetniki na Slovenskem* (ed. by Lovro Šturm), Ljubljana, 2000 (subsequently: *Brez milosti*), pp. 331–349.
- 25 PU Celje, tender of Rudnik Trbovlje-Hrastnik, d.o.o., 27/2/2002.
- 26 Archive of Okrožno državno tožilstvo (ODT) Celje, letter of Urad kriminalistične službe UNZ Celje to Okrožno državno tožilstvo No. 0221/24-5990-S-24/B-85/91 dated 22/9/1997; letter of Medicinska fakulteta, Inštitut za sodno medicino No. E 166/97 BJ/PK dated 17/2/1998, letter of Janez J. Švajncr containing an expertise to Okrožno sodišče Celje dated 31/1/2002.
- 27 ODT Celje, operational report of ODT Celje to Državno tožilstvo RS dated 27/8/1996; report of Veking, d.o.o., on the state of digging up and moving the mortal remains on the basis of the Decree I-Kpd 209/96.
- 28 According to the testimony by Janez Črnej familiar with the burial-grounds in the area of Celje, the route delineated by the planners was

such as to avoid the burial-ground; oral testimony to the author on 2/4/2004.

29 Mestna občina Koper, Urad za gospodarske in javne službe in promet, "Poročilo o organiziranju in pomoči pri iznašanju človeških posmrtnih ostankov iz kraških votlin socerbsko-podgorskega Krasa", 22/7/1992; Uradni zaznamek "Official Comment", 25/3/2004.

30 That could be seven caves in the districts of Koper and Sežana (Špirnca, Jama pri Socerbskem Kalu, Socerbska Sveta Jama, Vilenica, Bremce, Dolska Jama, Socerbska Jama za Vrhom), from which mortal remains of 60 persons were removed by cavers in 1992 and were buried in the city cemetery in Koper in 2004.

31 With the exception of crosses erected or built, there were no further developments. Lajše is an exception, since it is the future central burial-ground and memorial for the Primorsko region, where civilians were executed in 1944 out of revenge for the severe failure of the communist school in Cerklno. A memorial chapel was built there, and a path to the edge of the wood paved with granite. The Stations of the Cross were marked, and large signs erected, while the access route to the ravine was expanded and a monument with memorial plaques erected in front of it.

32 The following monuments are planned for the year 2004: in Tezno pri Mariboru, in Zgornja Bistrica, in Huda Jama, in Brezno pri Konfinu and in Jama pod Macsnovo Gorico. The fact that some districts are not interested in erecting the monuments should not be neglected.

33 The dedication on the military burial-grounds from Art. 2 of this Act, except on burial-grounds of foreign armies, runs as follows: "Casualty(ies) of war, Republic of Slovenia", while the text on the burial-grounds of victims of war and those killed after the war from Art. 4 of the Act runs as follows: "Victim(s) of war and post-war executions, Republic of Slovenia."

There were quite controversies over the dedication text among the politicians and in the media before the Act was passed. Execution in the strictest sense of the word indicates the execution of a sentence, a judgement passed by a court. In our case this sense of the word execution is disputable since most of the victims were killed without a judicial trial, without a sentence, and therefore the term murder or wilful murder could be used. Furthermore, the executed persons were denied their basic right – the right to a grave, which was a similar if not greater crime. It is thus believed by some that the inscription defined by the Act is biased. They favour the inscription: "Victims of war and revolution." These, however, were contradicted by those who claimed that the term revolution is polysemic. Some favour the inscription "Victims of war and revolutionary violence", while others believe that the actual set-up of the burial-grounds and reverence for them as well as the victims buried there are of greater importance.

34 On the basis of a survey of all locations and the reliability of oral and written sources it can be estimated that 85% of ca. 400 locations are actual burial-grounds. Still, the question remains how accurately all the hidden burial-grounds can be located so that each grave could be delineated without being interfered with. The percentage here is much smaller. There are several locations where the existence of a burial-ground is known, yet the place itself cannot be confirmed at the site. Such locations were, nevertheless, recorded since more accurate data may be available in the future. We know from experience that some locations can be accurately defined only after a second or third examination or with other informers. Metal detectors are one of the non-aggressive methods of establishing reliability in field surveys. Remnants of ammunition were thus discovered in some locations, or some wire or a spade, which confirmed the assumption that the sites were actual burial locations.

35 Metal detectors were one of the non-aggressive methods used for establishing the reliability in our final field surveys. This was carried out with the help of criminal investigators. Remnants of ammunition were thus discovered in some locations, or some wire or a spade.

36 The cause for this is lack of sources without which the existence of victims in individual burial-grounds cannot be anticipated without any doubt. Or in some cases the data were known, but there were no more relatives from whom the material for analysis could be acquired. The first two hidden burial-grounds from which DNA samples were taken were in Zgornja Bistrica. Only few personal items were discovered in both cases. A ring was found in the first one, belonging to a missing brother from the vicinity of Ljubljana. A DNA test of a long bone located near the ring was carried out, yet it refuted the assumption. Tests were made for two skeletons with marked physical features, but they were impossible to identify – the relatives were no longer alive and there was no way of acquiring comparable material. The fourth comparison was made at another burial-ground in Zgornja Bistrica. The DNA test was carried out with the bones of five skeletons excavated on Jelovica, where the identity of the victims was assumed on the basis of testimonies of witnesses. However, the comparison of samples taken from presumed relatives failed to confirm the assumption.

37 Katja Drobnič, "Preiskava DNK iz kosti in zob: Identifikacija po več kot pol stoletja", Delo, Znanost, 16/6/2003.