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## THE Holocaust Sites of Europe

An Historical Guide

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## CROATIA AND BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

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Wartime Croatia – which encompassed most of modern Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina – was a unique case in the Holocaust, a state in which genocide of the Jews (and others) was principally carried out by the indigenous government rather than by the Nazis. Indeed, it is believed that no other regime earmarked a greater proportion of its *own* citizens for extermination.

Jews had lived along the Dalmatian coast since Roman times whilst Turkish control in the early modern period encouraged significant immigration from Spain and Portugal to Bosnia. However, most of Croatia was under Austrian rule from the sixteenth century which prevented widespread Jewish settlement until the 1780s. Thereafter, there was migration from other areas of the Austrian Empire, creating a heterogeneous community. The combined pre-war Jewish population of Croatia and Bosnia – both part of Yugoslavia – was close to 40,000.

Germany and its allies (Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria) invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941. The country was largely divided amongst the victorious powers but Hitler created the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) out of the territory of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (although Italy took the coastline) and installed Ante Pavelić's *Ustaše* movement in power. Pavelić and his followers shared the Nazis' obsessive hatred of Jews and Roma; both were rapidly stripped of civil rights in a series of decrees between April and June 1941. Pavelić even went so far as to redefine the clearly Slavic Croats as 'Aryans', a deviation from Nazi racial theories that Hitler was willing to indulge. The *Ustaše* extended their eliminationist racism to a third group, the Serbs, around 2 million of whom lived in the NDH. Indeed, the first great wave of *Ustaše* terror in the summer of 1941 was primarily directed at Serbs, with the judicial murder of the intelligentsia and chaotic rural massacres. The summer also saw the creation of a network of concentration camps, the largest and most notorious of which was the Jasenovac complex, to which tens of thousands of Jews, Roma and Serbs were sent in the following months. Supposedly labour camps, these institutions also served as places of mass extermination,



Croatia & Bosnia-Herzegovina

characterised by a level of brutality which shocked even the German military, itself engaged in the murder of Serbia's Jews at this time. Such misgivings were not shared by the SS; indeed, fear that the bloodshed might cease led the Germans to intervene in the spring of 1942 when it was agreed that remaining Jews would be deported to Auschwitz. Five transports in August 1942 and a further two in May 1943 were sent to Poland, carrying more than 6,500 Jews. It is believed that around 33,000 Croatian and Bosnian Jews were murdered by the Nazis and *Ustaše* along with most of the 30,000 or so Roma and at least 300,000 Serbs. Around 5,000 of the Jews who survived owed their lives to the protection of the Italians; following Italy's capitulation, the partisans stepped in. The terror only fully ended with the *Ustaše*'s final defeat in April 1945 when Pavelić and many other leaders escaped via the same channels as the Nazis to Argentina where the former dictator became an advisor to Juan Perón. Pavelić was shot by an unknown assailant in Buenos Aires in 1957 and, following Argentina's belated agreement to extradite him to Yugoslavia, fled to Spain where he finally died of his wounds in 1959.

The genocide in the NDH, and particularly at Jasenovac, was central to the Tito regime's sense of legitimacy. Memorialisation thus followed the dictates of Party doctrine – which exaggerated the death toll – and Tito prevented further research into the issue. This created a sense of grievance amongst many Croatian nationalists who believed that the record of the *Ustaše* was being used to discredit their aspirations: acrimonious debates about what happened in the war played a prominent role in the prelude to Yugoslavia's fragmentation. The Holocaust remains a source of embarrassment in Croatia and public memorialisation has been limited and often contentious. This was most clearly revealed in discussion of what to do with the Jasenovac memorial, damaged in the 1991–95 war. President Tudjman suggested its transformation into a memorial to all victims of the Second World War and of the later conflicts, a proposal swiftly dropped in the face of universal international criticism.

## JASENOVAC

Nowhere has the legacy of the Holocaust been more controversial than at Jasenovac, the 'Auschwitz of the Balkans'. Like Auschwitz, Jasenovac was actually a group of camps, spread over a wide area around the Sava River on the modern border of Croatia and Bosnia. Two camps in

neighbouring villages were established in the summer of 1941 but were soon superseded by the main camp (officially Jasenovac III) later that year. This was augmented by a number of other institutions, notably execution grounds at Donja Gradina across the river and a camp for women and children at Stara Gradiška almost 20 miles to the south-east (until June 1943, the population of Jasenovac III was exclusively male). What makes this history so contentious is the fact that the camp was created and administered not by the Nazis but by the *Ustaše*; it is thus intimately associated with the history of the only independent Croatian state before the 1990s and, therefore, central to the competing nationalist mythologies of the region. Certain facts are beyond question. Tens of thousands of prisoners were devoured by the Jasenovac system, primarily Serbs, Jews and Roma in line with the *Ustaše*'s demented racist philosophies. Very large numbers of these prisoners were murdered in horrific ways, mainly in Donja Gradina, whilst thousands of others died of disease (particularly typhus), starvation and sheer exhaustion.

The unanswerable question, and the source of much of the heated disagreement which continues to this day, is that of how many victims there were. The Communist position, still widely believed in Serbia, was that at least 700,000 people were murdered. If true, this would make Jasenovac the third deadliest camp in Europe, ranked only behind Birkenau and Treblinka. However, it is generally believed that the figure was exaggerated, perhaps deliberately: as with the long-claimed 4 million dead at Auschwitz, the higher the number of victims, the greater the moral legitimacy of Communism for having defeated such evil. There is evidence that a desire to maximise Yugoslavia's war reparations was also significant. In later years, Serb nationalists could equally use the 700,000 to justify resisting Croatian claims to statehood. The inflated figure rather inevitably provoked a reaction from Croatian historians, including the future president Franjo Tuđman, who went to opposite extremes: in their revisionist version, Jasenovac was merely a labour camp in which perhaps only 20,000 people died. The exact truth will never be known, given the lack of proper record-keeping by the *Ustaše* and their later destruction of what written evidence there was. However, historians have been able to establish at least minimum figures: the Jasenovac museum has identified 69,842 victims of whom 18,812 were children. Serbs account for almost 40,000 of this number, Roma close to 15,000 and Jews more than 10,000. It is reasonable to assume that the



Jasenovac (Photograph by the author)

actual numbers are rather higher. Ultimately, it cannot be denied that Jasenovac was a place of unspeakable horror and the deadliest non-Nazi concentration camp in the Axis.

The camp was destroyed by the *Ustaše* as the partisans approached in April 1945 and the large site was converted in 1968 into a memorial park dominated by a huge concrete memorial sculpture described by its creator Bogdan Bogdanović as a 'melancholy lotus'. It is surrounded by mounds which represent different buildings within the camp. Railway tracks run alongside the park's southern path, carrying a train of the type used to bring prisoners. At the western edge of the park, a nondescript Communist building houses the museum. This was badly damaged in the war of the 1990s – Jasenovac village has very visible scars from the conflict – and again revealed the ability of Jasenovac to divide: the Croats accused the Serbs of looting the museum, the Serbs alleged that objects were removed because of desecration by Croat forces. In any event, the

Bosnian Serbs eventually handed over the collection to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum which has played a prominent role in the creation of the new exhibition, opened in 2006 (Tue–Fri, 9.00–5.00, Sat–Sun, 10.00–4.00; free; [www.jusp-jasenovac.hr](http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr)). This is evident in the even-handed approach, not least to the vexed question of numbers, and the extensive use of multi-media (including video interviews with survivors) although the dark interior and low positioning of the information panels are more reminiscent of Communist museums. Perhaps the most touching artefacts are the notebooks and drawing book of six-year-old Tedi Drausnik who was held in the Jasenovac complex with his mother and brother. All were eventually able to leave but Tedi's teacher, 17-year-old Vidoka Vuković, was murdered in 1944. By the entrance is a book listing the known victims of Jasenovac; it has 1,888 pages.

Jasenovac is by the A47 south of Novska: the road passes the site, the lotus clearly visible, before a turning a kilometre west of the museum

Donja Gradina (Photograph by the author)



leads back to the complex. There is an easily missed small memorial in the centre of Bročice, between Novska and Jasenovac off the A47: this was the site of the short-lived Jasenovac II camp in 1941. There are a small number of trains each day to Jasenovac from Novska which itself stands on the main Zagreb to Belgrade line.

## DONJA GRADINA

Donja Gradina was the principal execution ground for Jasenovac, located just across the Sava River from the main camp. Prisoners were brought by barge and subjected to the full range of *Ustaše* savagery: hanging, throat-cutting, burning, beating with hammers. In Yugoslav times, it formed a part of the Jasenovac memorial complex but is now separated from the main area by an international border, being part of the Republika Srpska, the Serbian zone of Bosnia-Herzegovina. As a result, most of those who visit the site are Serbs; indeed, many visitors to Jasenovac are unaware of the existence of Donja Gradina. It is easy to reach, however, and helps to bring home the reality of the camp as well as to highlight the very different historical perspectives of Serbs and Croats.

The start of the memorial area is marked by the 'Poplar of Horror', the tree from which thousands of Jasenovac prisoners were hanged, now resting on stilts by the roadside. The road curves around the north of the site, following the course of the Sava; the large field and forest to the south contain most of Donja Gradina's mass graves, marked by raised banks of earth: 125 have been identified but there are probably more. As the road enters the forested area to the east, an Orthodox cross, a Star of David and a chakra wheel (for the Roma) represent the main victims. Large signs in the forest set out the widely held Serb view of Jasenovac which few historians would now accept: 700,000 victims of whom 500,000 were Serbs. Nearby are large canisters and vats which, according to the official version, were used to manufacture soap from the bodies of prisoners. The story that the Nazis made soap from the fat of Jewish victims is one of the great myths of the Holocaust which was widely believed even at the time. It may be that a similar process is at work here but during the 1999 trial of former commander Dinko Šakić, ex-prisoners testified that there were indeed failed attempts in Donja Gradina to make soap.



The site can be accessed from Jasenovac by crossing the Gradina border point across the river, accessed by a modern bridge a mile or so west of the museum. In theory, permission from the border guards is required to visit the memorial but this should be a formality. Although most people cross the border by car, it is eminently possible to do so on foot.

## OTHER SITES

Zagreb was home to the largest Jewish population in Croatia, almost 12,000 strong in 1941. Most were murdered at Jasenovac or Auschwitz. There is a memorial to the victims, marked by a statue of Moses, in the south of the city's magnificent Mirogoj cemetery on Hermanna Bollea, north of the centre ([www.gradskagroblja.hr](http://www.gradskagroblja.hr)). A car park at Praška 7, close to central Ban Jelačić square, stands on the site of Zagreb's synagogue, blown up by the *Ustaše* in 1941. It is marked by a memorial plaque but the Jewish community, currently located a couple of blocks east at Palmotićeveva 16, hopes to build a new community centre and synagogue on the site.

Around 12,000 of Bosnia's pre-war Jewish community of 14,000 lived in Sarajevo. The former Sephardic synagogue on Mula Mustafe Bašeskije houses the city's Jewish museum, reopened in 2004 following closure during the siege of the 1990s. In the hills above the city, the Vraca memorial complex honours over 7,000 Jews along with other citizens and partisans who were killed in the war; however, the site was badly damaged during the siege.

## SERBIA

The history of the Holocaust in Serbia is comparatively little known yet is of great significance, coinciding with and paralleling that in Poland and the Soviet Union. By the time the mass deportations began in much of the rest of Europe in 1942, Serbia's Jews, aside from a small number in hiding or fighting with the partisans, had already been murdered.

A small Jewish community had existed since the Roman period but only became a significant element once most of Serbia was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire (a process completed in the 1520s), facilitating the settlement of Sephardic immigrants from Spain and Portugal. Ashkenazi communities also developed in the northern provinces, taken over by Austria in the eighteenth century, which now border Hungary. Given the close association between Jewish prosperity and Ottoman rule, it is hardly surprising that Serbian independence in the nineteenth century caused unease. Although many Jews supported the independence movement, the fears of pessimists seemed justified when a series of restrictive laws were introduced from the 1830s onwards; full civil equality was only granted in 1889. The situation improved in inter-war Yugoslavia with prominent Jews playing a leading role in the country's economy and anti-Semitism largely absent from the political arena.

All was to change, of course, with the German invasion of April 1941. Although part of the northern Vojvodina region was given to Hungary, most of Serbia was under direct German military occupation alongside the quisling government of Milan Nedić. Initial policy followed that in other occupied nations with the familiar catalogue of legal separation, exclusion from professions, economic expropriation and forced labour. However, from the summer of 1941 this escalated into a policy of genocide with a speed matched only by the simultaneous killings in the USSR. It thus marked a key stage in the development of the Holocaust. The official justification for mass murder was the rapid emergence of partisan resistance which led the Germans to adopt a retaliation strategy of killing 100 Serbs for every soldier killed and 50 for every one wounded. This was expressed in a relentless campaign of terror against the civilian population, especially in the countryside, which paralleled



the *Ustaše* atrocities in Croatia. Thousands of Serbs were murdered but increasingly Jews were the target of the German violence. From August 1941, Jewish men were imprisoned in a handful of camps with wholesale slaughter beginning in the following month; by December, almost all were dead. Some historians have suggested that the murders in Serbia were a local affair, a way of filling the increasingly unachievable retaliation quotas the Germans had set themselves. However, Harold Turner, the SS chief in Serbia, perhaps let slip the truth when he noted that 'they had to be got rid of, anyway'. The anti-partisan campaign was a convenient cover in another sense in that the Wehrmacht could be left to carry out the killings, seeing the process as a military necessity. However, the army's sense of honour, which had had little difficulty in accepting the shooting of unarmed Jewish men or Serbian peasants, did balk at killing women and children. It was, therefore, decided to concentrate all remaining Serbian Jews in a single camp, Sajmište. When their planned deportation was delayed (the newly created Polish camps had many other victims waiting), it was decided to kill the women and children in situ: virtually the entire Jewish population was murdered by mid-May 1942, giving rise to Turner's famous boast that Serbia was the only country where the 'Jewish problem' had been solved. The most commonly quoted figure is that 14,500 out of 16,000 Serbian Jews died in the Holocaust. However, this excludes the Hungarian-controlled Vojvodina where several thousand more Jews lived: most also perished, through massacres in early 1942, use as forced labour, and deportation to Birkenau along with the Hungarian Jews in 1944.

Post-war Yugoslav memorialisation in Serbia was naturally the same as in Croatia, with a focus primarily on Serb suffering so that sites largely associated with the murder of Jews were overlooked. This began to change after the break-up of Yugoslavia although the wars and economic problems of the 1990s limited progress. Rather surprisingly, given their centrality to the nation's modern sense of identity, even locations where Serbs formed the majority of victims, such as Banjica and Jajinci, remain rather run-down.

## BELGRADE

Belgrade was home to more than two-thirds of the Jews of German-occupied Serbia, with a 1941 population of 11,870. A Jewish presence in

the city was recorded in Roman times and it had been an Ashkenazic centre of some note in the Middle Ages. However, it was Ottoman conquest in the sixteenth century and the consequent influx of Iberian refugees that gave Jewish Belgrade its identity, this latter group forming more than 80 per cent of the community. The city's rapid growth following Serbian independence was accompanied by further Jewish settlement.

Belgrade fell within a week of the invasion of Yugoslavia, occupied by the Germans on 13 April 1941. Loss of rights in the early months served as a prelude to the escalation of policy in late summer when all Jewish men were arrested; they were executed between October and December. The women and children were sent to Sajmište in December. Around 10,500 Belgrade Jews were murdered – the only survivors were those who had managed to hide in the city or flee to the partisans.

The traditional area of Jewish settlement was the Dorćol district which runs from the Old Town north to the Danube. The community is commemorated by a Holocaust memorial next to the river created by Nandor Glid, a Serbian Jewish Holocaust survivor who has designed memorials across Europe, including at Dachau. His trademark style of sculpted entwined bodies is used in this case to suggest the shape not only of a menorah but also of flames. The memorial is located next to a children's playground on the Danube embankment just to the east of Tadeuša Koščuška and the 25 May sports centre.

A few blocks further south, Tadeuša Koščuška intersects with Visokog Stevana. The grey corner building (number 2 on the latter street) was the former headquarters of the Jewish Women's Society which was converted into a Jewish hospital following the exclusion of Jews from the 'Aryan' healthcare system in 1941. On 19 March 1942, the patients were taken to Sajmište to become the first victims of the gassing; the doctors followed their charges a week later. Jevrejska runs parallel to Tadeuša Koščuška and, as its name suggests, was the heart of Jewish life, particularly around the intersection with Solunska. A handful of buildings preserve some traces of this past notably the magnificent Moorish-style edifice at Jevrejska 16 which housed the *Oneg Shabat* and *Gemilut Hasadim* charities; today it serves as a cultural centre.

Growing Jewish prosperity and integration in the late nineteenth century encouraged the wealthy to settle closer to the centre, attested to by the former merchants' mansions which punctuate the Communist architecture of Cara Dušana. The community's offices are located in a

large nineteenth-century building at Kralja Petra 71a which also houses Belgrade's Jewish History Museum (Mon–Fri, 10.00–2.00 (despite the entry plaque saying otherwise); free; [www.jimbeograd.org](http://www.jimbeograd.org)). The displays are somewhat dated, most obviously the final section on 'free socialist Yugoslavia'. Nevertheless, the collection of old photographs and relics of a now almost vanished life is affecting. A substantial section is devoted to the Holocaust with items retrieved from Sajmište, Banjica and Jasenovac displayed. The Moorish Beth Israel Sephardic temple – Belgrade's main synagogue – stood around the corner until it was burned down by the Nazis. The spot is now occupied by the National Museum's Gallery of Frescoes at Casa Uroša 20; there is a memorial plaque by the entrance. The only remaining synagogue (a large Ashkenazi structure guarded behind high walls) is further south at Maršala Birjuzova 19. The synagogue was apparently requisitioned for use as a brothel for the German military, hence its survival.

East of the centre, the Sephardic Jewish cemetery at Mije Kovačevića 1 (Sun–Fri, 8.00–7.00 (until 5.00, Oct–Mar)) is opposite its small and often closed Ashkenazi equivalent which adjoins Belgrade's principal municipal cemetery. The complex of necropolises is completed by a memorial site containing the graves of 2,000 partisans and Soviet soldiers who died in the liberation of Belgrade in 1944. All can be reached by taking tram 12 or buses 23, 27, 27L or 32 to the Novo Groblje stop. At the rear of the Sephardic cemetery is a large Holocaust memorial including a grave for the remains of 197 Belgrade Jews and plaques to individual victims and families. To the right of the central path, a mass grave holds the remains of 800 Jews who formed part of the Kladovo transport by a memorial erected by the Vienna Jewish community. In late 1939, a group of over 1,000 mostly Austrian Jews left Bratislava by boat intent on reaching Palestine. After several false starts, they were able to get as far as Yugoslavia before being stopped by a combination of harsh weather which froze the Danube and the refusal of the Romanian authorities, under British pressure, to allow passage. They were forced to spend the winter in the small Danubian town of Kladovo initially on the overcrowded boats and then in a tent camp. When they finally departed in September 1940, it was not to the Black Sea but back northwards to the town of Šabac where they remained through another winter, around 1,100 falling into the hands of the Germans in April 1941 – 200 or so mainly younger refugees had managed to obtain certificates for Palestine

and had left days before the invasion. The men, together with Roma also held at Šabac, were murdered. The women of the Kladovo transport were sent to Sajmište in January 1942, sharing the fate of all of its Jewish inmates.

## TOPOVSKE ŠUPE

Topovske Šupe was a short-lived but deadly camp, its history marking the beginning of the German campaign of systematic genocide in Serbia. It was established in August 1941, officially as a transit camp for Jews, on the site of pre-war artillery barracks (the meaning of its name in Serbian) on the then southern edge of Belgrade. The first inmates were Jews from the north-eastern Banat region and by mid-October it had become clear what 'transit' meant in this context: all the men were taken away in groups – sometimes hundreds at a time – to be murdered, primarily at the Jajinci execution grounds south of the city. They were replaced by the Jewish men of Belgrade who in turn suffered the same fate as did Roma men also interned in the camp. In total, there were around 5,000 victims. In December 1941, the 300 or so remaining Jewish men were transferred across the Sava to prepare the new Sajmište camp; on completion of their work, they too were shot.

The grounds of the camp stand at the intersection of Bulevar Oslobođenja and Tabanovačka, just south of the busy Autokomanda road junction. Following post-war use as workshops, a number of buildings survive in a rather derelict state, enclosed behind fences. However, a small memorial park was created in 2006 on the edge of the complex, off Tabanovačka. A path leads across the grass to the surviving wall of an otherwise destroyed barrack on which has been placed a memorial plaque in the form of a Torah scroll with a short text.

The memorial park can be reached by taking trams 9, 10 or 14 or bus 33 from the centre of Belgrade to the Trg Oslobođenja stop. Tabanovačka is the eastern turning at the roundabout a few metres back; the park is around 200 metres along this street.

## BANJICA

Banjica is the best-known camp amongst Serbs, a reflection of the fact that most of those who passed through it were partisans and other

political prisoners rather than Jews. It was created in July 1941 in army barracks; unlike in Tupovske Šupe and Sajmište, the Germans shared the administration of the camp with officials of the Nedić regime. According to the preserved records, 23,697 people passed through it until its closure in October 1944 of whom 3,489 were executed. However, it appears that a large number of execution orders were destroyed whilst prisoners who were shot on arrival were not recorded, meaning that the total number killed was probably much higher. This is perhaps one reason why only 300 Jews are listed amongst Banjica's victims although a sadder explanation is that most were already dead by the time Jews started to be sent to the camp in 1942. Inmates were largely taken to Jajinci to be murdered although others were killed in Banjica itself and in the Belgrade cemeteries. Prisoners were also dispatched to camps further north including Auschwitz and Mauthausen.

After the war the camp reverted to military use, a role it still performs today. Unsurprisingly, the mostly modern complex is, therefore, not open to visitors. However, an annex of one of the few surviving wartime buildings houses a museum dedicated to the camp, albeit one which is frustratingly difficult to access. It did once keep regular opening hours but it is now necessary to ring 3674 877 or 2630 462 in advance to visit. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that anyone will answer. Hopefully, the Belgrade City Museum ([www.mgb.org.yu](http://www.mgb.org.yu)) which oversees the site will eventually restore easier entry. The exhibition itself was created under Communism and is thus rather old-fashioned in its approach although there are some interesting examples of prisoner artwork. A memorial room lists Banjica's victims.

Banjica was originally a village outside Belgrade but it has been swallowed up by the city's suburbs since the war. The army base stands on Pavla Jurišića Šturma, around a mile south of the Red Star football stadium. The entrance to the museum is a few yards north of the main gate. It can be reached by taking buses 40, 41, 59, 78 or 94 to the Banjica stop: Pavla Jurišića Šturma is the road opposite.

## SAJMIŠTE

Sajmište (literally 'fairground') is deservedly the most notorious of the concentration camps in Serbia although it was technically within the territory of independent Croatia during the occupation. In October



1941, the Germans decided to intern all Serbian Jews in a single camp prior to their deportation; the NDH granted the use of pre-war exhibition grounds facing Belgrade on the west bank of the Sava. As Jewish men were already being murdered across Serbia, the camp was essentially designated for women and children. The surviving Jews of Belgrade were ordered to report to police in December 1941 and immediately sent to Sajmište (sometimes referred to as Semlin or Zemun) where they were soon joined by Jews from other parts of the country as well as Roma women and children. The large trade fair pavilions had naturally never been intended to serve as living quarters and conditions were consequently appalling. 'Floors' were created inside the pavilions by installing wooden scaffolding through which prisoners had to crawl whilst there was no heating, few toilets and just one shower room for the whole camp. When it became clear that deportations to Poland would take longer than intended, German officials complained to Berlin with the result that a gas van of the type used at Chelmno was sent to Sajmište in March. In the space of just nine weeks, at least 6,000 women, children and the small number of men who had thus far survived were murdered in this van whilst being driven through the streets of Belgrade. Each group was told that they were being relocated to a new, more comfortable camp – 100 people volunteered for the first journey – and driven across the river on a pontoon bridge and through the city to the execution grounds at Jajinci, by which time all were dead. Close to 8,000 Jewish inmates of Sajmište died, the remainder from disease and lack of food in the camp; the only survivors were a few women with foreign citizenship who had married Serbian Jews and the Roma women and children who survived the winter (the latter were released before the murder of the Jews began). Sajmište was then converted into a camp for political prisoners and remained in use until mid-1944: around 10,000 of the approximately 30,000 Serbs held in this period lost their lives. It was progressively abandoned after being hit in an American bombing raid in April 1944 (the target was actually the railway station across the river) and handed back to the NDH in May although Jews en route to other German camps were held there as late as September 1944; Jews thus formed the last as well as first inmates.

Although most of the camp was destroyed by the 1944 bombing, a few pavilions still exist. A large monument stands by the river but a memorial plaque, by the steps to the path leading to it, was stolen in 2006, meaning there is now no explanation of what is being memorialised. The post-war



Sajmište (Photograph by the author)

blocks between the monument and the Art Deco tower (the centre of the camp) stand on the site of two of the large pavilions which housed Jews and Roma. The largest pavilion of all, which held 5,000 Jewish women and children, was to the south of the tower. The surviving buildings are on the stretch of Staro Sajmište (a street which branches off in a number of directions) closest to the highway to the north. The former camp hospital – now the *Poseydon* nightclub at Staro Sajmište 20 – gained worldwide attention in 2007 when it booked the British band Kosheen; the band withdrew when they discovered the venue's history. The rather run-down Art Deco building on the opposite side of the road held both the shower room and the morgue. The two-storey building to the east of the *Poseydon* (by a small roundabout) was the 'pavilion of death' where often fatal beatings of prisoners took place when the camp held Serbs.

Sajmište lies on the west bank of the Sava, now part of New Belgrade. The memorial is hard to miss, by the embankment between the Brankov and Stari Savski bridges (the two northernmost on the Sava). The central tower can be clearly seen from the monument; the other surviving buildings are a block to its north.

## JAJINCI

Jajinci was the largest killing centre in Serbia, the final resting place of thousands of Jews, Roma, partisans and political prisoners. It had served as an army shooting range before the war so it was no surprise that the Germans should turn it into an execution site. Amongst the earliest victims were the Jewish and Roma men of Tupovske Šupe along with others killed in the anti-partisan 'reprisals' from the summer of 1941. Prisoners from Banjica and Sajmište (after its conversion into a 'political' camp in summer 1942) were also shot there as were partisans captured in the countryside. The most appalling period was the spring of 1942 when the mass shootings were supplemented by the daily arrival of the Sajmište gas van and its terrible cargo. A team of seven Serb prisoners had to unload the van; once the deliveries ceased, they too were murdered. At least 80 trenches were dug just for bodies of the women and children of Sajmište. As in Poland and the USSR, the turn in the war led the Germans to attempt to destroy the evidence: from November 1943, a group of 100 Jewish and Serb prisoners, overseen by German policemen, were required to dig up bodies and burn them. This is one reason why there is no clear way

of knowing how many people were killed at Jajinci although the fact that bodies were still being burnt almost up to the liberation in October 1944 suggests that the figure must have been large. The number most commonly quoted in Serbia is 80,000 although the Serbian Orthodox Church, rarely known for its restraint in such matters, has suggested 127,000. The figures were certainly in the tens of thousands, with evidence that an astonishing 68,000 bodies were disinterred by the disposal team in 1943–44.

The site was turned into a memorial park in 1964 (the twentieth anniversary of Belgrade's liberation) but is now rather neglected. There is little indication of its history beyond a small memorial wall at the park's entrance marked with a typically Communist relief of victims and heroic partisans. Aside from a quotation from the poet Desanka Maksimović closer to the main memorial area, this is the only text given. The landscaped park itself is dominated by a large abstract metal sculpture, vaguely suggestive of a dove of peace, atop a tall plinth, behind which are preserved a few posts from the shooting range. This is the central focus for annual memorial services but at other times the meaning would be opaque without any foreknowledge of Jajinci's history.

Jajinci village is just south of Belgrade, shortly after the lengthy Bulevar Oslobođenja turns into Ulica Umetnička. It can be reached by taking buses 401 to 407 from the Voždovac interchange (itself served by trams 9, 10 and 14 from central Belgrade) to the Maxima stop. The memorial park entrance is further along the road on the left.

## OTHER SITES

The main internment centre in southern Serbia was the Crveni Krst (Red Cross) concentration camp in Niš; it is now a memorial museum (Mon–Fri, 9.00–4.00; Sat; 10.00–3.00; 50 RSD) located on Bulevar 12 Februar, north-west of the city centre. Around 30,000 people went through Crveni Krst, the majority Serb political prisoners. Over a third were murdered at an execution site on Bubanj hill overlooking Niš to the south-west; they included more than 1,000 local Jewish men shot in late 1941 (the women were sent to Sajmište). The site is now marked by a memorial complex centred around three large sculpted fists. In the city itself, the former synagogue, now used as an art gallery, stands on Ruđera Boškovića close to central Kralja Milana square. The Jewish cemetery was neglected for decades and part of the site was occupied by

Roma families. Since 2004 a cooperative effort of the local Jewish and Roma communities together with the city authorities and the American Joint Distribution Committee has seen much of it restored. For more information, contact the Niš Jewish Community at Čairska 28/2, south of the centre.

A particularly infamous massacre took place at Kragujevac, between Belgrade and Niš, in October 1941 following a partisan ambush of German troops in nearby Gornji Milanovac. After killing all male Jews and suspected Communists, the German military proceeded to arrest all adult men, even dragging entire classes of teenagers from the local school. Hundreds were shot in a period of seven hours. According to the army's figures, 2,324 men were killed in Kragujevac; this was in retaliation for 10 German soldiers killed and 26 wounded. The killing site in Šumarice, just west of the town, became a large memorial park in 1976 although it was damaged by NATO bombing in 1999.

Novi Sad, as capital of Vojvodina, was occupied by Hungary. During three days in January 1942, Hungarian troops massacred around 1,300 people, more than 800 of them Jewish, the remainder mainly Serbs. Although murders took place all over the city, the largest number were shot by the banks of the frozen Danube and their bodies thrown into holes in the ice. There is a memorial on the embankment by Kej Žrtava Racije, just south of Trg Neznanog Junaka. The city's synagogue was later used as a holding centre for deportees; the restored building at Jevrejska 11 on the western edge of the Old Town is now a cultural centre. There is a Holocaust memorial in the Jewish cemetery at the end of Doža Đerđa to the south-west.