

= Skull Tower =

The Skull Tower (Serbian : Čele kula , ????? ???? , pronounced [tʃel ʔ e kula]) is a tower composed largely of human skulls located in the city of Niš , Serbia . During the 1809 Battle of Čegar , fought during the First Serbian Uprising (part of the Serbian Revolution , 1804 ? 1817) , Serbian revolutionaries under Stevan Sinđelić were attacked by Turkish forces on Čegar Hill , near Niš . Rather than be captured by the Turks and impaled , Sinđelić fired his pistol into a powder magazine , killing himself and all Serbian rebels and Turkish soldiers in the vicinity . Afterward , Hurshid Pasha , the Turkish vizier of Niš , ordered that a tower be made from the skulls of the killed Serbian revolutionaries . The tower is 10 feet (3 @. @ 0 m) high , and originally contained 952 skulls embedded on four sides in fourteen rows .

Following the Turkish withdrawal from Niš in 1878 , the tower was roofed over , and in 1892 a chapel was built around it . In 1937 , the chapel was renovated . A bust of Sinđelić was added the following year . In 1948 , Skull Tower and the chapel enclosing it were declared Cultural Monuments of Exceptional Importance and came under the protection of the Socialist Republic of Serbia . Further renovation of the chapel occurred again in 1989 . As of 2013 , 54 skulls remain on the tower ; the one that is said to belong to Sinđelić is enclosed in a glass container . Seen as a symbol of independence by Serbs , the tower is mentioned in the writings of French Romantic poet Alphonse de Lamartine and English travel writer Alexander William Kinglake . In the two centuries following its construction it has become a popular tourist attraction , visited by between 30 @, @ 000 and 50 @, @ 000 people annually .

= = History = =

= = = Background = = =

During the time of the Ottoman Empire , Turkish forces were known to create tower structures from the skulls of their enemies in order to create terror amongst their opponents . The First Serbian Uprising (part of the Serbian Revolution , 1804 ? 1817) against Ottoman rule erupted in 1804 , with Karađorđe Petrović as its leader . On 19 May 1809 , 3 @, @ 000 Serbian revolutionaries led by commander (Serbian : vojvoda , ?o?????) Stevan Sinđelić were attacked by a large Turkish force on Čegar Hill , located close to the city of Niš . Owing to a lack of coordination between Serb commanders , the revolutionaries failed to receive any support from other Serbian rebel detachments . The numerically superior Turks lost thousands of troops in numerous attacks against the Serbs , but eventually overwhelmed the Serbian lines . Knowing that he and his men risked impalement if captured , Sinđelić took his flintlock and fired at his entrenchment 's gun powder magazine . The resulting explosion killed him , and all the surviving Serb revolutionaries and Turkish soldiers in the vicinity .

= = = Construction = = =

After the battle , the Turkish vizier of Niš , Hurshid Pasha , ordered that the heads of Sinđelić and his men be skinned , stuffed and sent to the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II . The skulls were then returned to Niš , where the Turks built Skull Tower as a warning to future generations intending to revolt against the Ottoman Empire . The tower stands 10 feet (3 @. @ 0 m) high , and originally consisted of 952 skulls embedded on four sides in fourteen rows . In the ensuing years , many skulls fell out from the tower walls , some were taken away for burial by relatives thinking they could identify the skulls of their deceased family members , and some were taken by souvenir hunters . Once the Ottomans withdrew from Niš in 1878 , the tower was roofed over to protect it from the elements . In 1892 , a chapel designed by the architect Dimitrije Leko was built over the tower with donations from across Serbia . A plaque dedicated near the chapel in 1904 reads : " To the first Serbian liberators after Kosovo . " The chapel was renovated in 1937 , and a bust of Sinđelić was

added the following year . In 1948 , Skull Tower and the chapel enclosing it were declared Cultural Monuments of Exceptional Importance and came under the protection of the Socialist Republic of Serbia . Further renovation of the chapel occurred again in 1989 . As of 2014 , 54 skulls remain on the tower , and the one that is said to belong to Sinđelić rests in a glass container .

== Significance and portrayal in Balkan culture ==

In the centuries following its construction , the tower has become a symbol of Serbian independence and a pilgrimage site for Serbs . It is considered one of the most visited places in Serbia , with 30 000 ? 50 000 tourists visiting it annually . In the early 1830s , French Romantic poet Alphonse de Lamartine wrote of the tower upon visiting Niš , which was at the time still part of the Ottoman Empire , saying :

I saw a large tower rising in the midst of the plain , as white as Parian marble ... [R] aising my eyes to the monument , I discovered that the walls , which I supposed to be built of marble or white stone , were composed of regular rows of human skulls ; these skulls bleached by the rain and sun , and cemented by a little sand and lime , formed entirely the triumphal arch which now sheltered me from the heat of the sun . In some places portions of hair were still hanging and waved , like lichen or moss , with every breath of wind . The mountain breeze , which was then blowing fresh , penetrated the innumerable cavities of the skulls , and sounded like mournful and plaintive sighs . My eyes and my heart greeted the remains of those brave men whose cut off heads made the cornerstone of the independence of their homeland . May the Serbs keep this monument ! It will always teach their children the value of the independence of a people , showing them the real price their fathers had to pay for it .

In 1849 British traveler Alexander William Kinglake described Skull Tower as the building that captivated him most in all of Ottoman Serbia , saying he was impressed by the " simple grandeur of the architect 's conception " and that he was struck by the " exquisite beauty of the fretwork . " An exhibition at the Military Museum in Belgrade contains a replica of the tower . Prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia , tens of thousands of schoolchildren from across Yugoslavia visited the original in Niš .

== Books ==

== Journals ==

== Websites ==