

Stories Inscribed in the Landscape: Tracing the Memory of Trentino Civilians Displaced during the Great War

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During the First World War, tens of thousands of inhabitants of Trentino were forcibly displaced from the southern borderlands of the Habsburg Monarchy. Many spent several years in Bohemia and Moravia before returning home after 1918. This paper examines how the experience of temporary exile, initially preserved primarily through family narratives, correspondence, diaries and photographs, gradually became inscribed into the cultural landscapes of both the Czech lands and Trentino. Drawing on concepts of collective and cultural memory and lieux de mémoire, the paper focuses on the spatial and material dimensions of remembrance. Particular attention is paid to graves and cemeteries of refugees who died in exile, commemorative monuments, memorial plaques, and, more recently, parks, street names and other toponyms created through partnerships between Czech and Trentino municipalities. In the Valle di Ledro, these dispersed traces have even been incorporated into a tourist itinerary connecting places associated with the Czech experience. The paper argues that these sites should not be understood as static remnants of the First World War, but as elements of an evolving transnational memory landscape. Their meanings have changed over time: places originally associated with displacement, death and separation have increasingly become symbols of Czech–Trentino friendship, reconciliation and local identity. The case thus demonstrates how cultural heritage emerges through the continuous reinterpretation of landscape, material traces and social memory across generations and national borders.

