



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (Ed.)

Killing Sites Research and Remembrance



METROPOL

Killing Sites – Research and Remembrance

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International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (Ed.)

Killing Sites

Research and Remembrance

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Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust

The members of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance are committed to the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which reads as follows:

1. **The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally** challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning. After half a century, it remains an event close enough in time that survivors can still bear witness to the horrors that engulfed the Jewish people. The terrible suffering of the many millions of other victims of the Nazis has left an indelible scar across Europe as well.
2. **The magnitude of the Holocaust**, planned and carried out by the Nazis, must be forever seared in our collective memory. The selfless sacrifices of those who defied the Nazis, and sometimes gave their own lives to protect or rescue the Holocaust's victims, must also be inscribed in our hearts. The depths of that horror, and the heights of their heroism, can be touchstones in our understanding of the human capacity for evil and for good.
3. **With humanity still scarred** by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, antisemitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils. Together we must uphold the terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it. We must strengthen the moral commitment of our peoples, and the political commitment of our governments, to ensure that future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences.
4. **We pledge to strengthen** our efforts to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust, both in those of our countries that have already done much and those that choose to join this effort.
5. **We share a commitment** to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions. We will promote education about the Holocaust in our

schools and universities, in our communities and encourage it in other institutions.

6. **We share a commitment** to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honour those who stood against it. We will encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual Day of Holocaust Remembrance, in our countries.
7. **We share a commitment** to throw light on the still obscured shadows of the Holocaust. We will take all necessary steps to facilitate the opening of archives in order to ensure that all documents bearing on the Holocaust are available to researchers.
8. **It is appropriate** that this, the first major international conference of the new millenium, declares its commitment to plant the seeds of a better future amidst the soil of a bitter past. We empathize with the victims' suffering and draw inspiration from their struggle. Our commitment must be to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity's common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice.

About IHRA

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) is an inter-governmental body whose purpose is to place political and social leaders' support behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance and research both nationally and internationally.

IHRA (formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, or ITF) was initiated in 1998 by former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson. Persson decided to establish an international organization that would expand Holocaust education worldwide, and asked President Bill Clinton and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair to join him in this effort. Persson also developed the idea of an international forum of governments interested in discussing Holocaust education, which took place in Stockholm between January 27-29, 2000. The Forum was attended by 23 Heads of State or Prime Ministers and 14 Deputy Prime Ministers or Ministers from 46 governments. The Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust was the outcome of the Forum's deliberations and is the foundation of IHRA.

IHRA currently has 31 member countries, eight observer countries and seven Permanent International Partners. Membership is open to all countries, and members must be committed to the Stockholm Declaration and to the implementation of national policies and programs in support of Holocaust education, remembrance, and research. Member countries are encouraged to develop multilateral partnerships and to share best practices.

The national government of each member country appoints and sends a delegation to IHRA meetings that is composed of both government representatives and national experts. In addition to the Academic, Education, Memorials and Museums, and Communication Working Groups, specialized committees have been established to address antisemitism and Holocaust denial, the situation of the Roma and the genocide of the Roma, comparative genocide, and special challenges in Holocaust education. IHRA is also in the process of implementing a Multi-Year Work Plan that focuses on Killing Sites, access to archives, educational research, and Holocaust Memorial Days.

IHRA has an annually rotating Chairmanship, and the appointed Chair is responsible for the overall activities of the organization. The Chairman-

ship is supported by the Executive Secretary, who is the head of the Permanent Office located in Berlin. IHRA also has an Honorary Chairman, Professor Yehuda Bauer, and an Advisor to IHRA, Professor Steven Katz.

One of IHRA's key roles is to contribute to the funding of relevant projects through its grant strategy. The purpose of the Grant Programme is to foster international dialogue and the exchange of expertise, increase government involvement in program creation, and target projects with strong multilateral elements in order to create sustainable structures for Holocaust education, remembrance, and research.

Preface

Approximately one-third of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust were murdered in what Father Patrick Desbois has called the ‘Holocaust by bullets’ – mass shootings that largely took place across Eastern Europe in thousands of forests, villages, streets, and homes. In many instances, German perpetrators and their local collaborators eliminated entire communities in a matter of days or even hours.

And yet these Killing Sites remain relatively unknown, both in regional histories and in the larger remembrance of the Holocaust. With the passing of both survivors and witnesses, efforts are underway by a range of actors who are determined to locate and preserve these sites and to name their unidentified victims. Recognizing the importance and urgency of this work, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) launched a Multi-Year Work Plan project on Killing Sites in 2011 to raise public awareness, offer support and expertise to diverse initiatives in this field, encourage further research, and pursue commemoration for educational purposes. As the first milestone of this plan, IHRA experts convened a major international conference on Killing Sites in Krakow on January 22–23, 2014. As this volume reveals, the ambitious program brought together an impressive mix of organizations, scholars, and experts who examined a range of subjects, including the state of current research; promising pilot projects; complex national and religious legal issues; developments in forensic archaeology; and regional efforts to integrate Killing Sites into educational curricula, among others. Just as important, however, the Krakow conference highlighted the challenges that remain and the vital importance of the work that must still be done. In this respect, it laid a valuable foundation for future international cooperation, one that IHRA member states will collectively foster in the years ahead.

In closing, we would like to congratulate the IHRA Steering Committee on Killing Sites – and in particular, Dr. Thomas Lutz, Dr. David Silberklang, Dr. Piotr Trojański, and Dr. Juliane Wetzel – for conceiving and organizing such an outstanding conference. We are indebted to them for their tireless efforts.

Dr. Mario Silva, 2013 IHRA Chair
Sir Andrew Burns, 2014 IHRA Chair

Foreword

More than 2,000,000 Jews were killed by shooting during the Holocaust – more than one-third of all the Jews killed – in several thousand mass Killing Sites in numerous countries in Europe. Whereas the majority of these Killing Sites were in Eastern Europe, their geographic scope covers much of the continent. The exact number of these sites is yet to be determined, but we now know of more than 2,500 in the Former USSR alone, and there were many hundreds, if not thousands, such mass murder sites in many other countries. Yet, whereas scholars of course have long been aware of the central importance of mass Killing Sites in the Holocaust, the subject has not registered with the same centrality in popular commemoration and memory. The popular focus on Auschwitz-Birkenau as the epitome and symbol of the Holocaust and of absolute evil, and the extermination camps in general as being the essence of the Holocaust, has left these thousands of sites where millions were murdered as part of the same “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” on the sidelines of memory and education.

At the same time, numerous dedicated organizations and individuals in many countries have devoted themselves to identifying these mass Killing Sites, marking them, researching and telling their stories, preserving their memory, and developing educational materials relating to at least a number of them. Still, many of these organizations and individuals have worked for years entirely on their own, often without even being aware of others doing similar work. Each organization or individual developed their own definitions, methods, and contacts, and each garnered valuable experience in dealing with various issues and problems, but to a great extent this all remained with each separate organization.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance through its Steering Committee for the Multi-Year Work Plan on Killing Sites, embarked on a project three years ago to heighten awareness of this centrally important aspect of the Holocaust and to facilitate bringing together the organizations and individuals dealing with the subject so that they may share their experience and develop closer cooperation. The first conference of its kind, “Killing sites – Research and Remembrance,” convened on January 22–23, 2014 at the Pedagogical University in Kraków, as a first step towards meeting these goals. Dozens of people representing fourteen countries participated, and the overwhelming enthusiasm expressed by the participants at

the end of the conference reflected the conference's success and the need for follow-up activities.

The book before you includes nineteen articles based on the papers presented at the conference, reflecting both research and fieldwork. The very fact that all these disparate organizations and individuals convened was in itself a significant achievement. From Dieter Pohl's magisterial scholarly overview of the subject to the local insights regarding Killing Sites and mass graves in numerous countries, the conference shed light on the complexity and variety of the subject, as well as the need to share information and pool resources. The participants in this book share with each other and with the reader the various challenges that they have faced, as well as their successes or lack thereof in overcoming obstacles. They tell of challenges of identifying mass Killing Sites; tracing the story of each site; legal, *Halakhic* (Jewish law), cultural, and political issues; efforts to involve local people and authorities as well as national authorities in the preservation and commemoration of these sites; conflicting memories that could lead to distorted commemoration, as discussed for example by Father Jacek Waligóra; or a desire to forget the events and the mass killings in some cases. In Lithuania, for example, meticulous work by diligent researchers resulted in the impressive *Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania*. However, whereas the English-language edition of the book practically sold out, the Lithuanian-language edition barely sold at all.

The countries represented and discussed at the conference are to an extent a reflection of where there has been greater effort to identify and preserve mass Killing Sites. The conference did not include representatives from all relevant countries because in a number of countries, such as Russia where there are 301 known mass Killing Sites, no one could be found who is engaged in the subject and was interested in participating.

What did we set out to accomplish with this conference and to what extent did we succeed? The conference goals are addressed in David Silberklang's introductory overview. The main goal of bringing all these people together and sharing information and insights was achieved. This is reflected in the overwhelming desire by the participants to have IHRA organize follow-up activities. At the same time, the desire for follow-up activity and looking at this conference as an important first step, but only a first step, on a long road reflect all that was not and could not be accomplished in an introductory two-day conference. No agreed definitions emerged, nor did agreed best practices. Much networking was achieved,

but a platform to facilitate constant mutual updates and sharing information remains a future project. The need to find, mark, and preserve the sites and tell their stories was shared by all, but the numerous issues and considerations faced in the different countries could be presented and discussed only in a preliminary fashion. And whereas there was consensus regarding the need for educational programs, all the details regarding which sites to highlight for educational programs, which target audiences, the goals of the educational activities, content and methods, etc., are still to be discussed.

A number of tasks emerged from the conference's success. This book is the first of those tasks – making the conference papers available to the participants and to all interested parties. Looking ahead, we have begun planning a web tool or platform that will facilitate sharing information among all the organizations and individuals involved in this work and where they can provide regular timely updates and share insights. We have also begun to discuss a follow-up conference or workshop that will focus on the work in the field. We hope that this second conference or workshop will also help set up a mechanism for future meetings.

The conference in Kraków made two things eminently clear to all who participated and to many who did not: mass Killing Sites is a central part of the Holocaust that requires extensive, systematic attention by researchers, fieldworkers, educators, and local and national officials; and IHRA is the organization perhaps best equipped to bring all these dedicated people together and to help them help each other in their work. Perhaps together we can preserve the memory of those whom the Nazis and their collaborators along with the vicissitudes of time and local and national cultures consigned to oblivion. And perhaps in that preservation and memory, we can make a small contribution to the arsenal of societal tools that can help prevent such crimes from being repeated.

*Thomas Lutz
David Silberklang
Piotr Trojański
Juliane Wetzel*

INTRODUCTORY LECTURES

David Silberklang

Killing Sites – Research and Remembrance

Introduction to the Conference and IHRA Perspective

As the first member of the Steering Committee to speak at this conference, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, Dr. Juliane Wetzel, the chairperson of our Steering Committee for the Multi-Year Work Plan on Killing Sites of the IHRA, who is unfortunately unable to attend this conference that she worked so hard on; Dr. Thomas Lutz, who has stepped in as interim Chair; Dr. Piotr Trojański, who together with the team that he assembled here has dealt with the organization; Dr. Miriam Bistrovic, who has been our intrepid coordinator, without whose efforts none of this would have moved forward; and Florian Kimmelmeier, who has recently joined our team. It has been an honor and a pleasure, and I look forward to our continued work together.

My job is to lay out what we at IHRA are hoping to accomplish at this conference; to lay out some of the questions and issues. I would like to begin with a story from a small place in the Holocaust – Hrubieszów, in South-eastern Poland.

Hrubieszów is very close to the border with Ukraine today. Many of its Jewish residents fled over the border into the Soviet Union early in the German occupation, seeing the USSR as the lesser of two evils. When the dust settled, so to speak, there were approximately 5,000 Jews in the town. Most of the Jews were killed in a series of round-ups and deportations to death camps from June to October 1942, leaving several hundred as forced laborers. During the first half of 1943, most of the remaining Jews were murdered, leaving approximately 100 Jews, mostly men, working in the camp on Jatkowa Street in early July 1943. The story that I am about to tell is based on approximately a dozen survivor accounts. Half of these 100 Jews were taken by train to the Budzyń camp on July 3. A week later, the other 50 were ordered to report to the town square for transfer to Budzyń. As they waited, the Gestapo brought over some 10 small children they had found hiding in

the camp. It turned out that the adults had hidden these children and had cared for them for months, but the Germans knew all along.

“Do these children belong to anyone here?” the chief asked. A couple in the group were the parents of two of the children. It was a tragic moment. They knew that if they admitted to having hidden the children from the Germans while they were living at the camp, they would be killed – and that nothing could save the children anyway. There was silence. No one claimed the children. Waldner ordered them taken away.¹

According to some of the testimonies, the children, too, refused to identify their parents or guardians. With this closing memory of their homes, the last Jews of Hrubieszów boarded the train for Budzyń.

There were many shootings of Jews in this town’s Jewish cemetery, as there were in many other Jewish cemeteries. The site of the Hrubieszów Jewish cemetery has a plaque in memory of the Jews, but no details of this specific event as far as I know.

This story is one of innumerable stories of mass killings of Jews by shooting or other methods besides gassing. In fact, many of the deportation operations in Poland and the Former USSR were accompanied by mass shootings and mass graves. For example, 2,000 Jews were shot dead in Lublin during the deportation of some 30,000 to Bełżec between March 17 and April 14, 1942, and approximately another 4,000 were shot in the Krępiec woods outside Lublin a few days later. In Warsaw, more than 10,000 Jews were shot during the “Great Deportation” of summer 1942.

1 Henry Orenstein, *I Shall Live: Surviving Against All Odds 1939–1945*, New York: Beaufort 1987, pp. 105–137, quotation from pp. 136–137; Abraham Goldfarb testimonies, YVA, O.3/2140, TR.11/01121/V; Josef Rechtszaft testimony, TR.11/01121/V; Bencion Fink and Dawid Rottenberg testimonies, TR.11/01238; Dov Finger testimony, O.3/2780; Hannah Levi testimony, TR.11/01121/V; Gisela Percec testimony, O.3/4237; Yitzhak Percec testimony, O.3/4238; Ruth Tatarko testimonies, O.3/7158, 7613; Zipora Nahir testimony, O.3/10488; Cipora Hurwitz testimonies, O.3/11783, and MA, A.296; Pinkas Hrubieszów, pp. 109–110; Cipora Hurwitz, *Forbidden Strawberries*, New York: Multieducator 2010, pp. 108–110. The story of the children is corroborated by the other testimonies. Hannah Levi and others recall that the children also refused to identify their parents. She estimates that there were eight to twelve children.

We know that in the USSR, within its June 1941 borders, perhaps some 1,500,000 Jews were shot between 1941–1943.

We know that in Romania, in Iași and other places in Bessarabia and Bukovina, as well as in Transnistria and on the way to Transnistria, perhaps as many as 400,000 Jews were murdered.

We know that in Croatia, Serbia, Budapest and elsewhere, tens of thousands more Jews were murdered by shooting.

In the General Government, in its original four districts, innumerable Jews were shot – perhaps as many as 300,000 (some 20 % of all the Jews), according to an estimate given more than a decade ago by the historian Shmuel Krakowski.

Most of these Jews were buried in mass graves.

If we add all these numbers together, we get to well over two million Jews who were shot to death in mass killings, or in some cases burned in buildings or murdered in other ways during the Holocaust. My estimate thus matches that of Dieter Pohl. Clearly, this is a subject that is central to the Holocaust, yet, although scholars have researched this topic, much remains to be done. And in the popular mind, this subject is far less known than other aspects of the Holocaust, and it is also, in a sense, more invisible.

The vast majority of these Killing Sites were deliberately left unmarked by the perpetrators and many have yet to be located. Many of these sites in the Former USSR and Poland were excavated by *Aktion 1005* under SS-*Standartenführer* Paul Blobel and the evidence was ground to dust.

Some Organizations That Have Worked on the Subject

Many organizations and individuals have been engaged in the last 20 or so years in some aspect of identifying Killing Sites, telling their stories, interviewing witnesses and survivors, marking, commemorating and, in some cases, developing educational materials regarding particular sites. Many sites have been identified to date, but many more have yet to be identified, marked, commemorated, etc.

At this conference, we have many such organizations and individuals represented.

We do not yet have sufficient comprehensive studies regarding Killing Sites. At the same time, there have been several important efforts to locate mass graves and commemorate those who perished.

I would mention only a few of these at this time, in the interests of time and in the knowledge that sitting in this hall are representatives of organizations that are engaged in various aspects of this important work, and who will be presenting that work during the next two days.

One early effort between 1995 and 2000 was by the Jewish Preservation Committee of Ukraine, which visited 495 mass graves, and the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad published its list in 2005.

Under the aegis of the UK's Holocaust Educational Trust, the "Baltic Mass Graves Project" located 308 Killing Sites in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Since its founding in 2004, Yahad – In Unum has pursued the ambitious aim of identifying every single Killing Site in Eastern Europe, interviewing eyewitnesses living near the sites and commemorating the victims.

The Lo Tishkach European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative was begun in 2006 as a joint project of the Conference of European Rabbis and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. It offers a publicly accessible database of Jewish cemeteries and mass graves in Europe as well as a compendium of the different national and international laws and practices affecting these sites.

Yad Vashem developed an "Online Guide of Murder Sites of Jews in the Former USSR" and an online-platform "The Untold Stories: The Murder Sites of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR," which has identified some 1,500 Killing Sites so far, with details regarding many of them, including maps and interviews.

"Dignity Return," a cooperative project of the Russian Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress American Section, was begun in September 2009 in order to bury the remains of victims of mass execution in a manner commensurate with Jewish law.

In 2010, Tal Bruttman, a historian in Grenoble associated with the Mémorial de la Shoah prepared a "Report on Mass Graves and Killing Sites in the Eastern Part of Europe" for IHRA.

Two independent projects were launched in 2010: In January, the American Jewish Committee initiated a cooperative and international project to seal and commemorate mass graves; and contemporaneously the Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania was founded by the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and the Austrian Verein Gedenkdienst.

Goals

What are we setting out to accomplish at this conference?

First, IHRA would like to facilitate introducing these organizations and individuals to each other, and where they have already been introduced, to help improve and enrich those contacts and cooperation.

IHRA does not plan to go out and do the work that other organizations are already doing. Rather, IHRA would like to help bring these organizations closer together and help them work together on some level.

We would like to facilitate sharing information and experience; mutual transparency; pooling resources where possible; developing accepted definitions and standards; best practices.

We would like to facilitate developing and establishing solid professional knowledge bases.

We would like to facilitate advancing the development of a common professional terminology.

Definition: One major obstacle for developing comprehensive research and commemorative and educational activities and materials is the lack of a precise working definition of a Killing Site in the Holocaust. Therefore it is important that we reach a generally applicable definition for the purposes of the work done by all these organizations and individuals.

What is each organization's definition of a Killing Site, which serves as the basis of its work, and what is their self-definition as an organization? How do we define the Killing Site? By the number of people killed? By the perpetrator? By the percentage of the Jewish population killed? By the time frame? By the context?

I would like to point to some of the issues regarding definitions with several illustrations: two types that I have already mentioned, and three from Crimea. In the story of the children in Hrubieszów with which I began, approximately 10 people out of 110 were murdered on July 10, 1943, and many more had been killed at that site from the beginning of the German occupation. The plaques at the cemetery commemorate the murdered Jews but not the specific shootings perpetrated at the cemetery. Would this be a Killing Site in our agreed definition?

Are mass shootings during or connected to deportation operations, such as those mentioned earlier in Lublin and Warsaw, or in the Krępiec Woods, within what we would all agree on as Killing Sites? And if so, where and how should these events be marked and memorialized?

The three illustrations from Crimea that I would like to note are all from small villages and communities. The events happened in one country, Russia, but each site is now in another country, Ukraine. In other words, any work on these and similar places will require international cooperation just to get to the story.

The first story relates to Ak Sheikh, a very small village that had no prewar Jewish community. Jews were brought there by the Germans from nearby villages and farms and were then taken to the water tower at nearby Razdolnoye and shot. The exact date and numbers are unknown. This story is based on one eyewitness account. There is no marker at the site.

The second story relates to Alchin-Frayhayt, also known as Velike. This was a village with a mixed population before the German invasion – with Russians, Jews and Germans living there. But the number of Jews on the eve of the invasion is unknown. Most of the Jews fled before the German conquest, but some 5 to 8 remained. They might have been one or two families. All of these Jews were shot at a clay pit on the edge of the village, but it is unclear if the shooters were Germans or Romanians. In the 1970s, relatives of the murdered Jews erected a small monument, which was destroyed around 10 years later when the adjacent farm expanded. There is no marker today.

The third case relates to Amansha, also known at the time as Jewish Amansha. This was a Jewish agricultural settlement before the war. Approximately 200 Jews were shot by an unidentified SS unit at the Serbryanka well on November 23, 1941; the bodies were thrown into the well. The place was renamed Pogranichnoye after the war. There is no longer any community there today. A monument was erected by the Soviet authorities, but with no mention of Jews. The monument was destroyed by “metal scavengers,” who were forced by the authorities to restore it.

Several questions arise from these stories. Are places with no prewar Jewish community and no details regarding numbers and dates Killing Sites? Are places where only a few Jews were caught but all these few were killed considered Killing Sites? Are places that no longer exist to be included? And what do we want to achieve in such places?

When we began our work on the Steering Committee, we developed a Working, Suggested Draft Definition of a Killing Site in the Holocaust. I would like to share that non-binding, working, suggested draft definition with you:

What is a mass Killing Site? The main criteria are that a mass killing was perpetrated and that it was perpetrated at a particular site designated for this purpose, such as a clearing in a forest, a cemetery, a building, etc. These mass killings were generally done by shooting. The mass murder by shooting at specially designated Killing Sites preceded the murder by gassing and continued parallel to it as well. Whereas mass shootings were also perpetrated at extermination and concentration camps (e. g., “Aktion Erntefest”), these will not be included in this definition (and project).

The definition rests on two main parameters: quantity and proportion of the Jewish (or Roma) population. In medium and large communities, a site where at least twenty-five people were murdered by shooting is a Killing Site; in small communities of several dozen Jewish (or Roma) families, a site at which ten people were murdered is a Killing Site.

Since we are dealing with human lives and deaths in a complex historical reality, the definition must also be flexible, with room for the researcher’s discretion.

In some cases, the mass grave at the Killing Site might contain remains of victims of other atrocities unrelated to the Holocaust, such as victims of NKVD murders, but where the victims at a Killing Site were victims of German or collaborator racist ideology, this site might be included in our discussions and joint efforts.

Once a Killing Site has been identified, how do we deal with it? What do we seek to accomplish once a Killing Site has been found and identified?

Are we seeking detailed identification, including exact coordinates?

Are we creating resources for scholarly research – written documents; photos and films; eyewitness testimony; survivor testimony; perpetrator testimony; trials; etc.?

What do we want to see done at the site? Mark the sites; fence them off in some way, if possible, and identify them in a way that will be obvious and clear to all? This can be a basis for on-site commemoration.

In some cases, we would like to see the development of educational programs.

And here are some further issues to consider:

- How do we facilitate and achieve pooling resources;
- sharing information;
- avoiding unnecessary duplication;
- identifying Killing Sites;

- marking a site and telling its story;
- commemorating;
- educational, commemoration, and research activities, etc.

We would like to know and share among the organizations involved in this work whether each organization works with local people. How do you find local people as eyewitnesses?

Is there government involvement – funding and cooperation – in your work?

What are each organization's goals and how do you accomplish them? What are your strategic questions? And what goals do you reject?

What obstacles have you encountered, and how are you dealing with them?

We would like to know and share how the players in the field who are gathered here for this conference handle the problem of potentially different victim groups in the mass graves and Killing Sites – people killed at different times and for different reasons, and perhaps by different perpetrators.

Reflections on Tyniecki Forest Site Visited on Tuesday

I'd like to conclude my comments with a reflection on the visit some of us paid yesterday to the Tyniecki Forest, around 20–30 minutes' drive from here. This forest is right next to the road. It is beautiful, pastoral and peaceful, and it is a Killing Site. On July 12 (approximately), 1942, Jews from Tyniec and other villages were gathered in Tyniec and then taken to these woods and shot. Local people witnessed the murder from the adjacent hilltop and from behind trees. The event was in village memory from that moment onward. In fact, as we entered the woods, we noticed on our left, up the hill, a statue of Mary. We asked our guide, Aleksandra Kalisz, who did an excellent job, why the statue was there, and she told us that in 1951, one of the men of the village had a vision that Mother Mary came to him and told him that the town must do something to remember the Jews who were murdered there. So, they set up a statue, and people would come there and pray. In 2005, a proper monument was erected on each of the two mass graves – each covered with a concrete slab and a memorial stone. The text on the stone refers to 500 Jews murdered at the site, but there are only 18 names; and Aleksandra, as well as other sources that I was able to check,

spoke of 150 killed. So, there is still much work to be done – getting accurate information; trying to discover the victims' names; trying to discover who the killers were. The text on the memorial stones is in Polish, except for the Hebrew acronym תנצב"ה (May Their Souls be Bound in the Bundle of Life) at the bottom. This commemorative site is meant for local people.

Much work lies before us, but as we say in Hebrew, we are all engaged in מלאכת קודש (M'lekheth Kodesh), work imbued with reverence and holiness. May we find success in our task.

Dieter Pohl

Historiography and Nazi Killing Sites

Some twenty years ago relatively few historians were interested in the so-called Killing Sites of the Holocaust, places of mass executions in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, the Baltic States, Poland, parts of Yugoslavia. Of course, historians were aware of the mass shootings in these areas, but they paid comparatively little attention to the places themselves. It was the survivors, the victims' relatives, activists of memorialization, often communal administrations who took care of these places of mass murder. Monuments were erected at many of these sites immediately after the war, and even more since the 1960s at major Killing Sites like Kiev (Babi Yar), Vilnius (Ponary), Kaunas (VII and IX Fort), and many other locations, in most cases without any reference to specific Jewish victims and sometimes remote from the actual execution places.¹

What is a Killing Site? If we look at the Nazi violence in general, there were three types of extermination: the most prominent, almost iconic killings by gas, predominately in the extermination camps of "Aktion Reinhardt," Bełżec, Sobibor and Treblinka, in Auschwitz, Majdanek and Chelmno and in mobile so-called gas vans, but also used during the mass murder of mentally disabled in the German Reich and in Poland. A second type of extermination was based on the creation of inhuman living conditions, deliberate starvation or lack of medical assistance, predominately in ghettos and camps. The mass executions can be considered as a third type of extermination technique.

The sites of *mass shootings* are now considered the actual Killing Sites, although the camps were also sites of mass killings. The term "Killing Site" probably originated in the language of criminal investigations, and was occasionally used in early descriptions of the Holocaust. A similar concept arose during the 1980s concerning the Khmer Rouge killings in Cambo-

1 Cf. the Information Portal for European Sites of Remembrance, <http://www.memorialmuseums.org/pages/home>.

dia: the “Killing Fields” are now associated with Pol Pot’s mass murders.² The awareness of mass executions as a *specific* form of political and ethnic crime rose during the 1990s, in connection with the violence during the Yugoslav Wars, especially in Bosnia and in Kosovo.

A *mass execution* can be defined as the killing of 10 or more victims who were herded together and shot in one place in order that the corpses might be buried in a mass grave. Mass executions in general were not a specific Nazi pattern of killing; they have been recorded since the invention of rifles, during colonial warfare and massacres, in modern conflicts like the Balkan Wars, or during the mass murder of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Mass executions were common practice to exterminate alleged enemies during Bolshevik rule, from the times of the Russian Civil War until the crushing of Gulag uprisings during the early 1950s.

National Socialist violence was always accompanied by murder, starting with the right-wing extremist political murders during the early Weimar Republic; it continued with the establishment of Nazi rule, the terror wave of 1933, and in the camp system. Obviously, there was no Nazi mass execution prior to the Second World War. Nevertheless, almost 10,000 persons were killed before September 1939, predominately in concentration camps, during the forced sterilisations or in connection with terror waves such as the November 1938 antisemitic pogrom.

Probably the first major German mass execution took place on 4 September 1939 in Czestochowa in Central Poland. As early as the brief German-Polish war, SS-Police units and Wehrmacht killed civilians on a large scale as reprisal for alleged irregular resistance.³ After the German military conquest these crimes were systematized. Especially in the Pomorze district mass executions of members of the Polish intelligentsia accelerated; in the Bydgoszcz area more than 10,000 civilians were shot in an alleged reprisal for the killing of ethnic Germans. But also in other regions, Polish teachers, clergymen, politicians and others were shot or arrested. Inmates of psychiatric institutions fell victim to mass executions, as did some Jewish

2 Cf. the “Cambodian Genocide Program” of Yale University with maps and a geographic database for 309 “genocide sites”, <http://www.yale.edu/cgp>.

3 Szymon Datner, *55 dni Wehrmachtu w Polsce. Zbrodnie dokonane na polskiej ludności cywilnej w okresie 1. 9.–25. 10. 1939 r.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MON 1967.

communities. Obviously the worst early anti-Jewish massacre occurred in Ostrów Mazowiecka on 11 November 1939. There, 364 Jewish men, women and children were murdered by the German Police Battalion 4.⁴ Most of these crimes continued until spring 1940, when men from the Polish intelligentsia were killed during the so-called Extraordinary Pacification Operation (Außerordentliche Befriedungsaktion).

During the war in Northern and Western Europe, Nazi violence was much more restricted, though cases of mass executions of French or British POWs occurred in France. Nevertheless, the general pattern of Nazi mass executions had been established in Poland, including the systematic search for specific targeted groups, deployment of SS, Security Police and Order Police, sometimes even Wehrmacht soldiers as executioners, and establishing specific Killing Sites. The majority of those were located in Western and Northern Poland: Around 15,000 victims were shot in Soldau SS camp (Działdowo), around 12,000 in Piaśnica, thousands in Minszek and Szpegawsk and at least 2,000 in Palmiry. Victims were transported either from prisons or psychiatric institutions to these places and shot.⁵

For almost one year, between mid-June 1940 and June 1941, other forms of violence prevailed, like the murder of mentally disabled people by poisonous gas; individual murders in the concentration camps; or the slow death within the ghettos in Poland. But mass executions returned to the agenda of German policies in spring 1941. After Germany and its allies attacked Yugoslavia, it was not the German leadership that initialized the next wave of mass killings but rather the new extremist Ustasha regime in Croatia, which unleashed a campaign of extreme violence against Serbs, especially in Southern Bosnia/Hercegovina from late April 1941 on. The Ustasha militias killed approximately 300,000 Serbian civilians, Jews and Roma, probably one quarter of them inside their infamous camp system. Thus there is no doubt that these regions should be included in the so-called "Bloodlands." In late May 1941 the German authorities started with their own executions as alleged reprisals for partisan attacks in Serbia, gradually turning against Jewish men as hostages. They had killed about

4 Markus Roth/Annalena Schmidt, *Judenmord in Ostrów Mazowiecka: Tat und Ahndung*, Berlin: Metropol 2013.

5 Maria Wardzyńska, *Był rok 1939. Operacja niemieckiej policji bezpieczeństwa w Polsce. Intelligenzaktion*, Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej 2009.

30,000 civilians, Serbs, Jews and Roma by early 1942, before the partisan war switched to Croatia.⁶

Thus there were dozens, perhaps more than 100 Killing Sites even before Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941 and unleashed the worst war of extermination in history. Operation Barbarossa not only meant the most extreme mass executions, but also became a catalyst for the introduction of other killing techniques. The first murders of Red Army political commissars were recorded on the very first day of the German attack, June 22, 1941; one day later, mass killings of Jewish men started.

From June 1941 until autumn 1942, the occupied Soviet Union, but even more the territories annexed in 1939 by Stalin, the Baltics, Eastern Poland and Bessarabia, became the major theatre of German mass executions. In a first wave, SS and Police units killed members of the “Jewish intelligentsia,” often together with communist functionaries. Soon all Jewish men aged 16-45 were murdered; as of August/September 1941 women and children were included. During that period, German units started to exterminate all Jews they apprehended in newly occupied areas. Due to this course of extermination policies, major massacres in 1941 occurred within the old Soviet borders, including Kamyanets Podilskyi, Kiev, Berdychiv, Vinnytsia, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Minsk.

Historiography focused for a long time on the mass murder campaigns of the mobile Einsatzgruppen in 1941/42, and not so much on its successor organization, the stable Security Police Apparatus, which started its major killing operations in autumn 1941 farther West, for example in Riga, Rivne or Stanislaviv.⁷

This is also one of the reasons why the mass killings in Eastern Poland in summer and autumn 1942 were neglected by researchers until the late 1990s, for example the massacres in Kovel, Pinsk or Lyuboml, and the dis-

6 Alexander Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien, 1941–45*, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 2013; Ben Shepherd, *Terror in the Balkans. German Armies and Partisan Warfare*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2012.

7 On major massacres: Elisabeth Freundlich, *Die Ermordung einer Stadt namens Stanislau. NS-Vernichtungspolitik in Polen 1939–1945*, Wien: Österr. Bundesverlag 1986; Michaela Christ, *Die Dynamik des Tötens: Die Ermordung der Juden von Berditschew, Ukraine 1941–1944*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch 2011; Jeffrey Burds, *Holocaust in Rovno. The massacre at Sosienki Forest, November 1941*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013.

solution of all the other ghettos in these areas. Already by late 1942, the so-called final solution, the mass executions of Jews in most regions of the Reichskommissariate Ostland and Ukraine, was completed, with some exceptions in the Baltics and Minsk. Jews from Eastern Galicia, however, were by and large deported to Bełżec extermination camp in 1942.⁸ Only in 1943 did the perpetrators in Eastern Galicia return to their practice of conducting mass executions on the spot.

Thus, the epicenter of the Holocaust in the second half of 1942 can be seen as located within Poland's old frontiers, with the murder of more than 10,000 people almost every day, by mass executions east of the Bug River and in the "Aktion Reinhardt" camps west of it. But even west of the Bug, in the so-called General Government, mass executions were a common feature of the Holocaust, either during the so-called ghetto raids or accompanying the hunt for Jews in hiding. And the "Aktion Reinhardt" itself was finalized by a series of giant mass shootings, the so-called Operation Harvest Festival, on 3/4 November 1943.⁹

During the systematic murder of European Jews, especially in 1941/42, the perpetrators looked for killing methods other than mass executions. Their main concern was the psychological effect of face-to-face killings of men, women and children on the German executioners. The lack of secrecy of mass executions was another argument in this discussion. Thus, in summer and autumn 1941, the killing experts of different institutions developed new systems of mass extermination, some of them taken from the "Euthanasia Program." By September 1941, they were using the poison Zyklon B for killing; by November the first so-called gas vans were available and in February 1942 the killings with exhaust fumes in camps started. And in Auschwitz and Majdanek large crematoria were built in order to destroy the very last traces of the victims.

These new killing facilities were meant for *Jewish* victims first and foremost, even though tens of thousands of non-Jews were also poisoned

8 Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941–1944*, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999; Christoph Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944*, Göttingen: Wallstein 2011; Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews 1941–1944*, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem/The Federation of Volhynian Jews 1990.

9 *Erntefest 3–4 listopada 1943: Zapomniany epizod Zagłady*. Red. Wojciech Lenarczyk, Dariusz Libionka. Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku 2009.

by gas. But in 1939/40, and even from 1941 on, Jews and non-Jews fell victim to mass executions: alleged political enemies in the Soviet Union, so-called undesirable Soviet POWs, and from spring 1942 so-called partisan suspects, or simply inhabitants of villages in partisan areas. To a certain extent, the dissolution of ghettos in Western Belorussia was connected to the anti-partisan operations; the perpetrators not only killed non-Jewish suspects in the partisan areas but also all Jews in the neighboring ghettos.

The German practice of mass executions as a means to eliminate partisans now spread all over Europe, beyond Yugoslavia and parts of the occupied Soviet Union. In late 1942, certain areas of Poland were declared partisan areas – “Bandenkampfgebiet.” This was the case in 1943 also in Greece and newly occupied Italy, and in 1944 even to a certain degree in France. Among the worst cases were the massacres during the early Warsaw Uprising in 1944, especially on August 4/5 in the Wola and Ochota quarters.¹⁰

Finally, the German retreat from Eastern Europe was accompanied by massacres. Already before 1944, inmates of prisons were shot in waves in order to make space for newly arrested suspects. During the German retreat, inmates of several prisons were systematically killed: for example, in Kharkiv, Minsk, Lublin and Łódź.¹¹ Massacres did not stop at the old 1937 borders of Germany. The evacuation of the concentration camps, starting in the East in July 1944 and intensifying in January 1945, led to a final wave of massacres, for example in Palmnicken (now Yantaroe) at the Baltic Sea coast, or the infamous massacre of Hungarian-Jewish forced laborers in Rechnitz at the Austrian-Hungarian border in March 1945.¹²

10 Zbrodnie okupanta w czasie powstania warszawskiego w 1944 roku (w dokumentach). Red. Szymon Datner, Kazimierz Leszczyński, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo MON, 1962; in detail: Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni popełnionych przez okupanta hitlerowskiego na ziemiach polskich w latach 1939–1945. Powstanie Warszawskie I VIII – 2 X 1944. Red. Maja Motyl, Stanisław Rutkowski, Warszawa: GKBZpNP-IPN 1994 (for internal use).

11 Only few of them have been subject to research: Hitlerowskie więzienie na Zamku w Lublinie: 1939–1944. Red. Zygmunt Mańkowski, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie 1988; André Hohengarten, Das Massaker im Zuchthaus Sonnenburg vom 30./31. Januar 1945, Luxemburg: St.-Paulus-Druckerei 1979.

12 Daniel Blatman, *The Death Marches. The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press 2011.

During this final period of the war, the fates of Jewish and non-Jewish victims became more and more intertwined, though it is evident that Jews received worse treatment even at that late stage.

It is reasonable to state that mass executions were a specific feature of the Holocaust, but also a feature of German violence against the non-Jewish population in Eastern Europe. And it is difficult to draw a clear line between crimes against Jews and non-Jews. The Einsatzgruppen started their mass executions against both Jewish men and non-Jewish alleged communists; among the Soviet POWs singled out for murder were approximately 50,000 Jewish Red Army soldiers, and the anti-partisan warfare included killing Jewish partisans or family camps uncovered in the forests. There were other overlaps.

Of the 5.6–5.8 million murdered Jews, approximately 2–2.2 million died in mass executions, 2.5 million in extermination camps, and approximately one million due to other circumstances, in ghettos, other camps or during death marches. The Germans and their Axis allies shot between 1.3–1.5 million non-Jews: partisans, Roma, specific groups of Soviet POWs, the mentally disabled, Bosnian Serbs, and others. Among all of them, probably more than 100,000 non-Jewish civilians were shot within or nearby camps or prisons. I am not including the mass killings by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army UPA, a nationalist and anti-communist underground force, which in 1943/44 murdered almost 100,000 Poles in Western Ukraine, since these crimes did not involve the German occupiers.

All in all, one can estimate that at least 3.5 million men, women and children were shot under Axis rule. It is very difficult to assess how many Killing Sites there were. For example, a useful overview on all mass killings of *Ukrainian* Jews lists approximately 2,000 entries.¹³ Although many executions were undertaken at the same place at different times, for all of the relevant regions in Poland, in the Former Soviet Union and Former Yugoslavia, it seems reasonable to give an estimate of between 5,000 and 10,000 Killing Sites in these countries, and several hundred in other parts of Europe.

The geography of Killing Sites is not difficult to define. Generally, from a German perspective it was clear that on-site killings could only be conducted in regions that were considered uncivilized, remote from interna-

13 A. I. Kruglov, *Entsiklopediia kholokosta. Evreyskaia entsiklopediia Ukrainy*, Kiev: Karavella 2000.

tional public opinion, and where the German occupation had abolished all legal restrictions. Thus until 1944, it was almost inconceivable to conduct mass executions in Western or Northern Europe. The so-called hostage crisis in autumn 1941 in France had caused an international outcry.¹⁴ The geography of the Killing Sites themselves was determined by the origins of the victims, especially the Jewish communities, towns and cities in Eastern Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania, Moldova, certain regions of Russia. Only in very few cases were victims taken to more distant Killing Sites, like German, Austrian, and Czech Jews deported to Riga, Kaunas or Minsk, or the railway transports to the Bronnaia Gora extermination site near Brest.¹⁵ But Killing Sites are also dispersed among the partisan areas in Belarus, central and Northern Russia, Serbia, or North-western Poland. Only few Killing Sites can be found inside Germany, for example the execution site for the Soviet POWs of Dachau camp, in nearby Hebertshausen, but also sites of massacres during the death marches, for example in Gardelegen or in Jamlitz.

To establish the topography of these places, it is necessary to take a historical perspective on the perpetrators. They were looking for places with specific features.

Most Killing Sites were located not too far from ghettos or camps, but in less populated areas like forests, parks, abandoned infrastructure or Jewish cemeteries. In many cases areas were chosen that looked especially suited for burying corpses, for example tank ditches, construction sites like Ponary or mine pits as in the Stalino region. But there were exceptions to these rules, like the March 1942 massacre of children in the middle of the Minsk ghetto, the infamous “yama” in Ratomskaya Street.

The German perpetrators considered mass executions as an appropriate method of killing alleged “enemies” in Eastern Europe all the way through the war, though killing by gas was used from December 1939, first in Poznań Fortress VII until March 1945, in the Uckermark branch camp of Ravensbrück.¹⁶ Since November/December 1941, killing by gas became

14 *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*. Series I, vol. 1, Frankfurt a. M.: Alfred Metzner 1984, p. 514.

15 Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 716–723.

16 Cf. Günter Morsch/Bertrand Perz (eds.), *Neue Studien zu nationalsozialistischen Massentötungen durch Giftgas. Historische Bedeutung, technische Entwicklung, revisionistische Leugnung*, Berlin: Metropol 2011.

the major method for the extermination of European Jews outside the Soviet Union. The mass executions were apparently considered more as a temporary means for the murder of specific groups, like the Polish intelligentsia or members of the Soviet State and Party apparatus, or in order to spread maximal terror among the population as in Serbia or the Soviet partisan areas. Only when the German war against the Soviet Union was falling behind schedule in summer 1941 did mass executions become the common feature of German extermination policies.

For the perpetrators, the mass executions had several implications: First, they meant a decentralization of extermination. The SS and police were not dependant on central infrastructure and coordination, as during deportations. Of course, central orders to kill specific groups in a certain area existed. But very often it was up to the regional SS and police leader or Security Police chief to control the time frame and extent of the mass executions. Decentralization also meant greater integration: of all German institutions in place; of all branches of the police; and due to the lack of personnel also other units like most parts of the occupation administration, Organisation Todt, Customs Services, Forest administration etc. Most of them cooperated in the mass murder but some tried to intervene, either in order to save Jewish workforce or – at least in some cases – out of humanitarian concerns. Not only German occupation authorities carried out mass executions, but also the units of other Axis states, like the Romanian Army, Gendarmerie or secret service, which were responsible for massacres in Bessarabia and Transnistria, and Hungarian units, which killed civilians en masse in the Bachka or partisan suspects in Northeastern Ukraine and the Briansk area. Even the Slovak Security Division killed 1,500 partisan suspects in Belorussia.¹⁷

The lack of personnel constituted a major obstacle for decentralized mass murder. In order to carry out mass executions, manpower was required not only for ghetto raids (as for deportations), but also for transporting victims out of town, for guarding the execution site and for the actual shooting. Local collaborators were much more involved in mass exe-

17 Jean Ancel, *Transnistria 1941–1942. The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns*, Vol. I. Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center 2003; Simon Geissbühler, *Blutiger Juli. Rumäniens Vernichtungskrieg und der vergessene Massenmord an den Juden 1941*, Paderborn: Schöningh 2013; Krisztian Ungváry, *A magyar honvédség a második világháborúban*, Budapest: Osiris 2004.

cutions than they were in the preparation of deportations. This involvement began in summer and autumn 1941, when auxiliary forces were set up in the Soviet Union and in Yugoslavia. It became indispensable for German perpetrators from 1942 on, both in the murder of Jews and of partisan suspects. Already in 1941, special groups of local executioners were set up, including the Arajs command in Latvia, or the first Auxiliary Battalions in Lithuania. In Estonia, most victims of German occupation were killed by Estonian police. From 1942 on, indigenous police acted increasingly on their own, especially during the hunt for Jews in hiding. Even Polish policemen in the General Government killed Jews apprehended in the forests or in the countryside, though mostly on an individual basis, as new research shows. The German perpetrators tried to entrust local policemen with the killings in order to avoid personal participation in face-to-face murder, especially involving children, who often were thrown into the burial pits alive and then suffocated.

Of course news of mass executions also had a specific impact on the intended victims. Reports about killings in nearby forests spread much more quickly than the murky rumours about the fate of deportees. The existence of nearby Killing Sites meant a further element of daily terror in the ghettos, camps and prisons. Some Jewish communities even sent couriers in order to identify the places of mass death.

And the mass executions could be much more violent than the deportations and killings in extermination camps. The victims were aware of their imminent fate right from the beginning of the ghetto raids. They were heavily beaten on the way outside the towns, some already shot on the road. The majority of victims were held at places near the execution sites and heard the shots; finally they were directly confronted with the murder of neighbors, friends and family members. In many cases, the perpetrators acted with extreme violence at the execution sites and humiliated victims. Many killers consumed alcohol during shooting actions. Victims were not immediately shot to death but fell heavily wounded into the pits and suffered for hours before dying.

Probably the rate of survivors of mass executions was somewhat higher than in extermination camps like Chelmno or in the "Aktion Reinhardt." But most of those who escaped from the convoys, collection points or even from the graves themselves were later apprehended and killed. Some succeeded in claiming that they were taken there mistakenly, because they were not Jews, and they were sent home. Very few survivors could testify

after 1945. For example, the testimony of witness Rivka Yosselevka, who in August 1942 escaped from a mass grave near Pinsk, was one of the darkest days of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem.¹⁸

Not all mass executions were prepared and pre-organized. Especially during the anti-partisan operations, German units entered villages rather unexpectedly and decided on the spot to kill all or some of the inhabitants. These were often chaotic manhunts and massacres, with corpses lying in the streets or nearby houses. Some victims were locked in houses and burnt alive, like Jews in the Bialystok synagogue in the summer of 1941. There was no effort to camouflage or hide the traces. The same applies to the killing of Jews hiding in forests or farms, who were shot on the spot, their corpses left in place.

This leads us to the perspective of the so-called bystanders, the local population near the Killing Sites, which was directly or indirectly confronted with mass murder. This perspective came into the focus of historiography only during the last 15-20 years. Since the concept of "bystander" is very broad, we have to differentiate between certain types. As this new research demonstrates, some of the locals collaborated in mass murder. Most important were the local auxiliary policemen, who not only supplied manpower for the Germans, but also knowledge. They knew their place, could identify victims and uncover hiding places. And unlike most Germans, they could communicate in place. Less known is the specific role played by the local administrations. Communal administrators had been involved in creating ghettos, sometimes even camps. There were cases when the Germans ordered the local administrations to give advice for appropriate locations or even to prepare pits for the mass executions. Locals had to sort the belongings of the victims and store them. And finally, the local administrations were made responsible for covering and disinfecting the mass graves. But there was more collaboration: not only denunciations of Jews in hiding, but also collaboration in murder. Several persons, especially younger ones, were recruited to assist the German mass murder in place, for example by preparing meals for the killers. This feature of local involvement has been uncovered in first place by interviews that Patrick

18 Dov Schmorak, *Sieben sagen aus. Zeugen im Eichmann-Prozess*, Berlin: arani 1962, pp. 192–208.

Desbois and his *Yahad-in Unum* team conducted in Eastern Europe.¹⁹ And locals profited to a certain extent from mass murder: Some searched execution sites after massacres for valuables, while others plundered the empty ghetto houses. But the main profiteers were the Germans, who kept all valuable property.

In general, the majority of the population was confronted with the massacres. News about the crimes spread quickly, and lots of executions, especially during the summer of 1941, were conducted in front of spectators. Sometimes even local women with their children watched mass killings of Jews as a kind of public spectacle. The effects of this brutalization were ambivalent: While some locals displayed their approval of the Holocaust, others were shocked and feared that – after the Jews were killed – the rest of the population might be targeted as victims. Thus, the mass executions spread an atmosphere of constant insecurity and terror and can be considered as an element of German rule in parts of Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, a minority of locals intervened for the victims, for their friends, neighbors or colleagues, and few locals even offered opportunities for hiding. It was extremely dangerous to hide Jews, communists or POWs, especially in the area of Killing Sites, since German authorities punished such rescuers with death, often including the whole family. The rescuers took an extreme risk since denunciations were quite common under German rule. So the Killing Sites became an integral element of local life in several Eastern European regions.

For the Nazi leadership, the Killing Sites started to become a problem only after the first military defeat during the battle of Moscow in December 1941. During their offensive, Soviet authorities found precise evidence of German crimes and published this widely. After a long discussion in Berlin and in the occupation administration it was decided to burn all corpses, both in extermination camps and at the Killing Sites. The latter was called “Operation 1005” and started in early 1943, right after the German defeat of Stalingrad and the Soviet discovery of the first Nazi mass graves on the Northern Caucasus. At this point German propaganda began to publish widely on Soviet Killing Sites, especially the Katyn massacre. The German

19 Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009.

leadership considered the Killing Sites a political problem only at a comparatively late stage.²⁰

After the war, most of the Killing Sites fell into oblivion. One reason for this is the decline of interest in Nazi crimes in general at the end of the 1940s; a second reason is the fact that the overall majority of Killing Sites were now located in the Soviet Union, which during the Cold War was not considered a victim but an aggressor.

Nevertheless, research on Killing Sites started very early, beginning with investigations by legal authorities and national commissions on German crimes and war damage. The Soviet Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment of German Crimes, to use the short version of its name, started to locate places of German mass murder from February 1943 on. They collected evidence, witness statements and in many cases exhumed victims of Nazi crimes. Of course, this investigation commission was a Stalinist institution that served the purpose of propaganda and restitution. And there has been much source criticism of the commission's handling of the Katyn case and its victim statistics. Even in cases of exhumed large mass graves, their estimates were much too high.²¹ Nevertheless, their source material is of enormous value and has not been fully combed through until today. The Soviet Union "re-discovered" the occupation only during the mid-1960s, and research on the crimes under occupation was not published before the mid-1970s, among it valuable surveys of the destroyed villages in Belorussia.²²

The Polish Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes against the Polish Nation worked much more accurately and in the beginning was less politicized. Already in 1947, a survey of all German crimes was conducted in the regions, which included mass executions. In 1968, a second survey was undertaken, which collected much more detailed results, including reports of individual killings in the countryside. Unfor-

20 Jens Hoffmann, *Das kann man nicht erzählen. 'Aktion 1005' – Wie die Nazis die Spuren ihrer Massenmorde in Osteuropa beseitigten*, Hamburg: Konkret 2008. Andrej Angrick is preparing an in-depth analysis of the 1005 command.

21 *Balanced view*: Niels Bo Poulsen, *The Soviet Extraordinary State Commission on War Crimes: An Analysis of the Commission's Investigative Work in War and Post War Stalinist Society*, unpublished PhD diss. Københavns Universitet 2004.

22 *Natsistskaia politika genotsida i "vyzhzhennoi zemli" v Belorussii: 1941–1944*, Minsk: Belarus', 1984

tunately, not all the results were published in volumes on each voivodeship, and this publication for internal use is available only in few libraries all over the world.²³ During the early 2000s, the Institute of National Memory, as a kind of successor organization, started to compile an overall survey of occupation victims, but as far as I know, this has not yet been completed. Additionally, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw started in the late 1940s to publish articles on killing operations against Jews in each occupation district, predominantly based on their collection of testimonies. In comparison, the knowledge of Killing Sites in Poland (within its present-day boundaries) is quite impressive, not least due to the seven decades of Polish historiography on the occupation.

I am not fully aware of the research in Yugoslavia, which also set up an investigation commission. Even more important was an overall survey of all victims of the occupation, conducted around 1960 for purposes of indemnification. Unfortunately the results were kept secret, since they contradicted the official victim statistics. But now the material is available to researchers.²⁴

Only during the 1970s did Western historiography gradually become interested in Nazi crimes, of course with the outstanding exception of Raul Hilberg. In 1981 a first comprehensive study on the Einsatzgruppen appeared, but only during the 1990s did the regions of Killing Sites come into focus. Historians then could use the enormous source material stored in Eastern European archives and more or less put together the map of mass murder in Eastern Europe. The breakdown of communist systems enabled Eastern European historians to reconstruct the Nazi crimes in their areas without any political obstacles, even to counter national narratives of common heroism and victimhood.

Now a comparatively broad knowledge of German extermination policies has emerged, except for most occupied regions of the Russian Federation. But there is still no comprehensive overview of the Killing Sites.

23 Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni popełnionych przez okupanta hitlerowskiego na ziemiach polskich w latach 1939–1945, Warszawa: GKBZHWP 1980–1988 (for internal use; apparently only for 39 voivodships). Recently, some of the descriptions esp. those of late individual murders of Jews have been challenged, since apparently Polish policemen were omitted as perpetrators.

24 Cf. Tomislav Dulić, *Utopias of Nation. Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941–42*, Uppsala: University Library 2005.

Several projects were launched as of the late 1990s. Since probably all of them are represented at this conference, I just want to mention some: The Yad Vashem Killing Sites Project, Yahad-in Unum, the “Baltic Mass Graves Project,” the initiative of the Russian Jewish Congress or the Lo Tishkach European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative. So there is a chance that in the near future a general database on Holocaust Killing Sites will be available, which might be supplemented by a survey of all Nazi Killing Sites, including those with non-Jewish victims.

But research must turn to the micro level, to the history of major mass executions, the perpetrators, the collaborators and the surrounding society, in order to form a comprehensive picture of these extraordinary crimes. Some studies are already available, including the book on the Holocaust in Berdychiv by Michaela Christ, or the publications on the 1941 pogroms in various places.²⁵ There are others.

As during the mid-1940s, forensic archaeology is still an important tool for reconstructing the crimes. Field research has been conducted at the camp and extermination sites at Bełżec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Majdanek, but less on Killing Sites in the narrow sense. These investigations, though some of them have been criticized for ethical reasons, also provide important evidence in the fight against Holocaust denial.

New forensic methodology can be applied now, building on experiences with research on other mass crimes such as in Cambodia or in Former Yugoslavia, even ancient or medieval mass killings, but less on Stalinist mass killings. I think it is necessary to combine the findings on Killing Sites from other periods and other countries in order to understand the types and dynamics of mass executions. One such effort is the Corpses of Mass Violence and Genocide project, based in several West European universities.

The task of historiography is twofold: On the one hand, research on the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes is proceeding on the micro level. From this perspective it can show not only the German personnel and its behavior, but also the reactions and actions of locals, and the interaction with the intended victims, predominately Jews. And historiography is turning more and more towards the post-war history of memory, on a national, but

25 Christ, *Dynamik des Tötens*; Kai Struve, *Deutsche Herrschaft, ukrainischer Nationalismus, antijüdische Gewalt. Der Sommer 1941 in der Westukraine*, München: de Gruyter 2015.

also on a local level. How did communities and citizens deal with mass graves in their environment? Were they completely ignored or preserved in local memory?

On the other hand, memorialisation has become increasingly important. Currently it seems possible to reconstruct all places of suffering and violent deaths of both Jewish and non-Jewish victims. In the long run, an appropriate memorial should be installed and in the future one of the main tasks is to reconstruct the names of all victims. This is especially difficult for the Killing Sites in Poland and the Soviet Union, but it remains an obligation for all of us, both historians and proponents of memorialization. From this perspective, most of the work remains to be done.

Andrej Angrick

Operation 1005: The Nazi Regime's Attempt to Erase Traces of Mass Murder

This article examines one of the most significant – and least well-known – operations in the history of the Third Reich, a regime that already had plenty of other secrets to keep, including the extermination of Europe's Jews, the systematic persecution of political dissidents, the mass murder of the Poles (downplayed as simply a “fight amongst ethnic minorities”), the campaigns against “antisocial elements,” the liquidation of the Roma, the “euthanasia” program to methodically eliminate handicapped people, the killing of prisoners of war and the burning of towns and villages. The German dictatorship applied a strict secrecy policy to most of these things, but one undertaking was handled with the utmost security precautions: *Aktion 1005* or “Operation 1005.” It was so secret that even this code name offered no semantic clues to the uninformed. Code words like *Euthanasie* or *Aktion Reinhardt* might have triggered a mental association, but what about “Operation 1005”? What could this signify? Nonetheless, Operation 1005 was not only one of the most secret, but also one of the most gruesome projects undertaken by the elite of German mass murderers – at least those under the domain of Himmler and Heydrich. This major undertaking had two components: *Aktion 1005*, which took place in all the extermination camps of the Third Reich, and the mobile *Sonderkommando 1005* (“Special Commando 1005”), which will be examined in greater detail here.

Aktion 1005

Operation 1005 was the code name for the clearance of all mass graves in an attempt to erase evidence of genocidal crimes beyond the frontier of the German Reich. It is not known when exactly the leading officials of the Third Reich decided to have the burial sites completely and systematically removed. Previous history, though, provided clear harbingers in terms

of forerunners or “test runs” – this particularly applies to the euthanasia program. A concern for concealment is already reflected in orders issued in late 1941 prohibiting the explicit telegraphic transmission of execution figures, banning the relevant photography and calling for the increased use of secret code, even in internal communications. However, the existence of corpses and mass graves could not be resolved with just a simple command.

The order to carry out “Enterdung” (a jargonistic word meaning “de-earthing”) at *every* gravesite seemed somewhat absurd, especially since there were so many sites whose exact positions had already been forgotten by the murderers and nobody knew how to best execute this order anyway. Burning official documents was not a problem, but excavating these necropolises of terror was another matter altogether. In any event, the operation was ultimately assigned to SS-Standartenführer Paul Blobel, the head of Special Commando 4a, who is also infamous for organizing the biggest massacre at Babi Yar during the Eastern Campaign, where exactly 33,771 people were murdered – including men and women, elderly people and children and even babies. Blobel took leave of his old unit on March 24, 1942 – and Operation 1005 must have begun no later than then. As anyone knows today from the internet, a suspicious code name can quickly provoke awkward associations. So in order to keep this operation a secret, it was simply named after its file number at the Gestapo office of the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or “Reich security main office”). Operation 1005 was launched even though the Third Reich was still at the peak of its power in the spring of 1942, with the following factors being the most likely triggers:

1. the Declaration of St. James’s Palace concerning the punishment of war criminals;
2. the temporary recapture of Kharkiv, Rostov-on-Don and other cities with high casualties, which made the Soviets cognizant of the German war crimes committed there; and
3. the March 1942 arrival in London of detailed reports from the Warthegau concerning the Chełmno extermination camp – which may have been the most important factor.

Having been assigned to the task, Blobel probably met with his boss Reinhard Heydrich – who acquainted him with the operation – in Warsaw

towards the end of March 1942. From there, Blobel went to Berlin where he received further details on his sinister new assignment from SS-Gruppenführer Heinrich Müller, who was head of Gestapo at the RSHA. This constellation of Heydrich-Müller-Bobel (all under the ultimate supervision of Himmler) is in itself rather interesting, because it considerably increased the importance of the RSHA in its internal power struggle with the SS about who was in charge of exterminating the Jews.

Himmler gave Blobel a special pass granting him every possible help. He could even override command hierarchies. Blobel was thus in a position to lean on both the SS and the police forces for support. However, his operation was still in the embryonic stage. He had neither a team nor an office and, most importantly, no technical knowledge about how to “clear” a mass grave. So he had to do a lot of research. In Berlin, he resided in the gracious Wannsee district while studying the files of the RSHA, especially those from Eichmann’s department, in order to gather information about the locations of mass graves and the number of people murdered.

Apart from that, he also traveled to Łódź (then called “Litzmannstadt,” the capital of the Warthegau and the site of a major ghetto), where he took a room at the General Litzmann Guesthouse in the early summer of 1942. From there he regularly visited the Chełmno extermination camp, where his plan was to have the first corpses exhumed in order to develop a feasible method for “disposing” of them without any traces. Chełmno was thus a place to start fulfilling his assignment while also testing out techniques for doing so. There was a “comradely” competition between two teams searching for the best procedure. One consisted of Blobel and his associates, while the other was headed by SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Bothmann, commandant of the Chełmno extermination camp. Both Blobel and Bothmann considered themselves “specialists” and seemed to have viewed each other as rivals, despite their clear difference in rank. Blobel ordered experiments at open gravesites to see whether it was possible to simply burn corpses inside a mass grave without first moving them to another grave. In July 1942, he received three flamethrowers, one flamethrower-recharging wagon, protective clothing and various additional implements from the stock of the Wehrmacht armaments department. There was also an increased demand for chlorine to be used for disinfection. For example, in late March 1942, the Kopernikus pharmacy in Posen dispensed just 1,641 kg. of chlorine bleaching powder, but late June saw the arrival of a 13 ton delivery. In any case, Blobel was unsuccessful in his attempts to incinerate corpses inside open

gravesites without first extracting them. Meanwhile, Bothmann ordered incendiary bombs for the Chełmno camp, which proved to be devastating. A controlled destruction of the corpses was not possible using these bombs. Their effect was so strong that they caused a forest fire, which of course ran contrary to the goal of strict secrecy, as local inhabitants were bound to notice these fires eventually. A former German guard would later testify to the activities that took place there:

“In the summer of 1942 they started opening the gravesites and burning the corpses. In this regard I would like to describe my observations at one of the mass graves during an assignment in the summer of 1942. Blood or a similar liquid was sputtering in thick streams from several places in this grave and was forming big puddles near it. I was unaware of the reason for what was happening. Shortly afterward, the graves had to be opened by the Jewish commando. In the meantime, three or four pits measuring 5 m. in length, 4 m. in width and 3 m. in depth had already been excavated. Those corpses that had been hauled out of the mass graves were then being stacked into these new graves, sprinkled with a powder and set on fire. [...] At this point I do not want to neglect mentioning that I watched the starving Jews assigned to this grave commando eat parts of the corpses they had just taken out of the graves.”

This testimony comes from a German court transcription – there are no statements from any survivors of this period at Chełmno. But even if they existed for discussion, no words could ever do justice to the events that happened there, or the suffering of the victims. An appropriate language for Operation 1005, a crime beyond all “experience and imagination,” has yet to be worked out. At this juncture, it is enough to know that after much experimentation, the murderers finally succeeded in developing the right incineration method: funeral pyres on grids made either of steel girders or ideally of railway tracks. The bodies, partly decayed, sometimes recognizable as an individual, were put on these grids, doused with oil and fuel and set alight. It may well be that the prisoners discovered amongst the dead their own missing friends and relatives, who were then dragged on special hooks to the funeral pyres in order to be stacked up in a pyramid shape. In 1943, Blobel’s team managed to stack 2,000 bodies on a single funeral pyre. The crucial fact is that Blobel was ultimately successful in eliminating all the corpses of an extermination camp, leaving no residues. When necessary, bone fragments were pounded by mortars or crushed by machinery (such as cement mixers and industrial coffee

grinders) to produce bone meal, which was then used as fertilizer or simply thrown into a river.

Blobel's work in Chełmno was finished by the end of 1942. But the procedure that was developed there would then be used at the extermination camps of Operation Reinhardt, the camps of the East, the burial grounds of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Bunkers 1 and 2) and again at Chełmno after its second opening in 1944. Still, the Nazi regime also needed to deal with the mass graves and forest execution sites where the victims of its mobile commando units lay buried. The main fields of action for Operation 1005 still loomed in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, particularly in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, but also in the General Government territory of occupied Poland, as well as Serbia.

Sonderkommando 1005

With the German defeat at Stalingrad, Blobel was immediately posted to the East. This urgency was mainly triggered by the Soviet Union's propaganda offensive after its Extraordinary State Commission publicized the discovery of mass graves containing 20,000 corpses at Rostov-on-Don. Goebbels issued an order not to react. Blobel's job was to make sure that this would not happen again. This led him to establish two subunits of *Sonderkommando 1005* ("Special Commando 1005"): Sk 1005-A and Sk 1005-B. The former was assigned to the General Commissariat of Kiev, while the latter was assigned to the General Commissariat of Dnipropetrovsk. Other subunits were also established: *Sonderkommando 1005-Mitte* ("center" or Sk 1005-C) for central Russia and Belorussia, as well as the largely unknown Sk 1005-D and Sk 1005-E for the Northern territories, particularly Lithuania and Latvia. But these units were certainly not capable of clearing the huge number of graves and burning all the corpses by themselves. Therefore, local Gestapo posts were also asked to establish their own Operation 1005 commandos in order to help unburden their specialist comrades. Furthermore, Blobel issued a general order in 1943 that prohibited the creation of new graves; instead, corpses were to be cremated immediately after executions. These rather abstract details all help to illustrate the great scale of the geography and labor involved.

Let us begin with the mission of Sk 1005-A in Ukraine. Special code words were used for internal communications: *Vorkommen* or "deposit"

for a mass grave, *Wetterstelle* or “weather station” for the geographic area of action, *Baustelle* or “construction site” for an exhumation site and *Wolkenhöhe* or “cloud height” for the number of corpses burned. The first “construction site” of Sk 1005-A was at the ravine of Babi Yar (in Kiev), which included several gravesites in addition to the area of the largest massacre. An estimated 50,000 corpses had been hastily buried here, the victims having been murdered between October 1941 and August 1943. The burial site was so enormous that Sk 1005-A needed support from Sk 1005-B for this operation; around 300 prisoners from the Syrets concentration camp were also forced into service for this terrible task, but some of them did manage to escape.

For Blobel, the results of the Kiev operation were double-edged. On the one hand, he had succeeded in clearing the graves just in time before the German retreat from Kiev, but on the other hand, the successful escape of a few prisoners – who soon gave detailed accounts of the atrocities via Radio Moscow – was an irreparable failure in his eyes. This would not happen again – no more prisoners managed to successfully escape in this Southern territory.

Sk 1005-A then moved on to Berdichev in the late summer of 1943. They had to get reorganized and make further preparations for excavating graves. Then, under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Julius Baumann, they continued onwards to the town of Belaya Tserkov. Upon their arrival in mid-October 1943, they asked the SS officer Gerhard Kretschmer for the assistance of the local Gestapo branch. Not wanting to alarm the residents of the town and its vicinity, Baumann spread the rumor that they were members of a “search commando for the detection of mass graves of Russian provenance.”

Apparently, Baumann thought he was being very meticulous and “inventive” by specifying that he was searching for a grave with the corpses of children. The official explanation was that they were looking for “incriminating evidence” in connection with the Katyn Massacre and suspected the existence of a mass grave near Belaya Tserkov containing the corpses of Ukrainian children from the Holodomor. They would need the support of the local populace in investigating that crime and people should not be otherwise concerned. Of course, they did not really care about Stalinist crimes, but instead were interested in recovering and cremating the bodies of ninety Jewish children who had been murdered in late August 1941, a tragedy that later became known to the public.

Otherwise, their actions were more or less routine. Baumann and his deputy Topheide forced twenty doomed men to dig out corpses. They may have been “accustomed” to the work, having possibly come from Kiev, or perhaps they had been brought along from Berdichev – unfortunately, this can no longer be clarified. In any case, the commanders of the regional branches of the SiPo and SD (the “security police” and “security service”), were asked to have enough local “workers” ready for Operation 1005 in the prospective “area of action.” These workers could only come from the local jails and interrogation centers. It took just one week to prepare the area, stack the funerary pyres and burn the decayed corpses. Seemingly incredible figures of 15,000 exhumed corpses have been cited for this short period of time. Finally, after a gravesite had been cleared, there was no more reason for the prisoners to stay alive, so Baumann had them shot.

From Belaya Tserkov, Sk 1005-A moved on to their new theater of operations, 120 km to the South. Starting in December 1943, they had to take care of the “deposits” at Uman. In contrast to many other smaller localities in Ukraine, Uman in the late summer of 1943 was not yet “judenfrei” (“free of Jews”), to use the language of the regime. So they also had to get rid of the remaining Jews (mostly craftsmen who had been forced to live in a ghetto), step by step, along with the detainees of the local prison in Uman, including adolescent “looters,” alleged partisans, captured parachutists, etc. The corpses of these people, as well as those from older gravesites, had to vanish. The number eliminated is estimated at 5,000 bodies, which were stacked into ten funeral pyres and set alight. The forced labor in this case was performed by a group of prisoners consisting of “about fifty Russians from the local General Commissariat.” As long as they had still work to do, exhuming corpses and scattering ashes, they were kept imprisoned in the local jail. Additional guards – young German men – had been assigned as “escorts” to control them and prevent any escape attempts. When the German military finally gave up the town, all of the commando’s imprisoned workers were eliminated.

Hans Sohns, the coordinator of Operation 1005 in Ukraine, had probably realized that his men should stay farther back from combat zones in the future. Working directly behind the front lines was increasingly seen to be counterproductive and dangerous. Kamenets-Podolsk, where Sk 1005-A was quartered in early January 1944, seemed to be a safer place; there, five local “deposits” were waiting to become “construction sites.” Twenty prisoners – “figures” or “the dead on leave,” as the condemned were also

called – were available to do the exhumation work. The local branch of the Gestapo had presumably saved these people from execution so that they could be placed at the disposal of the previously announced special commando. This would be only a temporary reprieve for them, a short extension of their suffering – hardly even a “reprieve.” Everything was otherwise predestined, their lives meaningless, a cruel playing with their hopes. There were two pits located near a hospital, with another three about 600 m. away from there. Almost 200 corpses were pulled out of the first two pits and cremated, with another 1,500 extracted from the bigger graves. Once again, this all took far too long – either they had overestimated the defensive strength of the German troops, or underestimated the vehemence of the Red Army attacks. In any case, the danger of becoming trapped was imminent. The order was given to stop digging and start retreating. It is certain that none of the prisoners survived beyond this point, finally being murdered.

The retreat was successful, but it was two weeks before the scattered soldiers reached the Gestapo in Lvov, where they were given shelter in a villa. There in the company of their comrades, they were “pitied a lot, because [they] had to suffer a great deal of strain.” All this helps explain why they proceeded more slowly in Lvov, which had been the scene of a great many executions by rampaging *Einsatzkommandos* (“deployment commandos”) in 1941. They only succeeded in clearing two small gravesites near Lvov – one containing around 200 corpses of children, the other around 100 bodies of adults. When the prisoners placed at their disposal were no longer of use, they were forced to lie down on the funeral pyres, where they were shot from behind and burned along with all the other bodies.

And the perpetrators? Exhausted and with their nerves on edge, the murderers saw themselves as the “cleaning crew” of a declining regime. Yes they were still loyal, but how much longer would that loyalty last? This troop, which was supposed to be better supplied and supported than any other, had not received the promised amenities. They were dissatisfied with their situation and when winter came, they had an even stronger desire to get away from their morbid, monotonous work and visit their families. The murderers longed for their homeland, the idyll of Christmas and an escape from grueling routine. They pitied themselves.

In November 1943, Blobel had already noticed the first signs of a psychic crisis among his men. However, he considered it too risky to grant them home leave. He said:

“I refuse to have any discussion about it. I cannot send commando members to their families. They won’t all keep their mouths shut. You can smell their job ten meters upwind, even if they get newly clothed from top to bottom.”

Nevertheless, the chief of operations understood the feelings of his subordinates. So they were permitted to take a holiday, since even the nerves of mass murderers needed to be treated with care. They were sent for a vacation in the spa town of Krynica in the High Tatra Mountains, thereby concluding the special commando’s work in Ukraine.

The Krakow District clearances, illustrating the difficulties of studying 1005

However, what were probably the most significant mass graves were actually located elsewhere, within the territory of the General Government (GG); it is with great justification that the pioneering doyen of Holocaust studies Wolfgang Scheffler said that all of Poland could be seen as a giant cemetery and memorial site. This may be why Blobel decided to use a different strategy for the GG and not establish standalone mobile 1005 commandos like those deployed in the USSR. Instead, each KdS (*Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes*, district commander of the SiPo and SD) would be responsible for clearing his own “weather station” area, mustering his own KdS-1005 units for this purpose. How Blobel came to this decision is not recorded, but there are two likely motivations. First of all, this would relieve some of the burden on the core organization of Operation 1005, meaning himself and his own personnel, who already had more than enough to do in managing the standalone 1005 commandos. Secondly, each KdS administration already possessed the information needed for locating the mass graves of its district and also had sufficient manpower – this just needed to be deployed correspondingly. And so it was in the autumn of 1943 that every KdS was required to report to Krakow at the offices of the BdS (*Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes*, the superior commander of all the KdS in the territory), in order to receive instructions concerning Operation 1005. Each KdS was required to ensure that a “commando was established, which was to clear the mass graves of the district,” under the leadership of the local Department IV (i.e. Gestapo) post.

Then in November 1943, SS-Sturmbannführer Hans Schindhelm (the head of Department IV in the BdS administration) was put in charge of the overall management and monitoring of these clearance efforts. It was only once Schindhelm (who had gathered relevant experience in the German-occupied territories of the USSR) took up his post that the organizational preparations were complete and operations could really start: The command to exhume old corpses was issued sometime in January 1944.

As an illustrative example, we will focus on the happenings of the Krakow District in order to point out – here at the original conference site – that much more investigation will still be needed in order to achieve even the smallest of research findings. This example shows how much information can still be acquired despite all the efforts at covering up, while conversely demonstrating how successful Operation 1005 really was and how little we ultimately know about the crimes of the Nazis and the disappearance of the mass graves despite decades of investigations. Even the local organizational structure of Operation 1005 in the Krakow District is largely unknown to us, since the administrative documents of the time no longer exist or – because of the strict secrecy guidelines – were never even written down in the first place, since purely verbal commands were considered sufficient for implementing this project. After the war, the perpetrators kept their silence, minimized the events, and/or were not even asked about the topic. What is certain is that the BdS and the various KdS all had to be actively involved in this matter, because the project would have been doomed to failure without their assistance and their Gestapo documents. Furthermore, the various HSSPF (higher SS and police leaders) ensured the disappearance of “Jew registries,” so that this statistical administrative documentation of the SS, which could have provided details on the extent of the genocide, would be kept from “unauthorized” access.

In the Krakow District, the KdS administration established two 1005 units for the clearance of mass graves. SS-Hauptscharführer Wilhelm Kunde (until the autumn of 1943 at the “Department of Jewish Affairs” in the KdS administration) and his assistant SS-Rottenführer Herman Heinrich could be considered the designated genocide experts; in any case, the recruitment phase of the Krakow 1005 unit coincided with the tail end of their tenure. The forced labor camp at Płaszów would play a particularly significant role here.

Construction of the Płaszów camp on Jerozolimska Street, covering the grounds of two former Jewish cemeteries (the “Old” and “New” ones),

began in late 1942; the camp was built on an execution site. This complex, under the authority of the HSSPF for Krakow, was divided into a housing sector, an administration area and an industrial zone. Barbed-wire fences ran between them, and beyond these were the storehouses (where plundered goods were kept) and the Hujowa Górka execution site. The camp was shielded from outside view by old earthworks and quarries. With more than 25,000 inmates, it was able to provide enough men to assemble a 1005 corpse brigade. With its well-secured infrastructure, Płaszów offered an ideal home for a 1005 unit based in Krakow. Furthermore, the camp commandant, SS-Untersturmführer Amon Göth, would make every effort to support Operation 1005, making it his own interest.

The other 1005 unit, led by SS-Untersturmführer Franz Schmidt, was considerably more mobile. In the summer of 1943, Schmidt attended the 1005 training camp in Lvov, but was then transferred back to the KdS administration in Krakow. There, he may have undertaken further preparations and information gathering, especially since his assignment covered not only the graves of murdered Jews, but also the secret burial sites of dead POWs. His 1005 unit was definitely on field deployment after that, as Schmidt was to start in the spring of 1944 with processing “weather station” areas that lay outside the district capital.

At Płaszów itself, the first 1005 coordinator was probably Franz-Josef Müller, an *Arbeitseinsatzleiter* (“labor deployment supervisor”) who had already gathered relevant experience in September 1943 in the town of Bochnia, moving on to Płaszów after Bochnia’s ghetto had been leveled. Meanwhile, in the bathhouse at Płaszów (the building was actually the repurposed mortuary of the former Jewish cemetery), a delicately built man spent several months working even more intensively with the local corpses. SS-Unterscharführer Rolf Lüth combed the soil and made his gruesome finds into a hobby. He built up a special collection, including skulls, human skin, etc. There were even rumors that Lüth’s obsession with death had gotten so extreme that he sometimes spent the night in a coffin. However, Lüth was not some self-taught dilettante, but rather a highly trained expert. As a Berlin-educated “Tropical Hygienist, Disinfectant and Animal Pest Controller” of the Pflaum Department, his original assignment had been to stem the spread of typhus, in cooperation with the camp doctor SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Maximilian Blanke. But the main focus of attention for both men would eventually be on the skeletons already lying underground.

We also know that locally focused 1005 subunits (as offshoots from the main units) were similarly active elsewhere in the district. For example, in Bochnia in September 1943, the corpse porters assumed that the dead would be buried in graves, or at least have dirt tossed over them, but then were harshly corrected by the supervisor of this effort, the ghetto commander SS-Scharführer Franz-Josef Müller, who barked: “Burial? What? We don’t want another Katyn.” It was clear that the corpses were to be burned. This was why action was also taken on the grounds of the notorious SD training school in Rabka, as the dead had been buried there, too, and now needed to be cremated. Such prominent locations had to be secured, as these were the ones that would be quickly targeted by later investigators.

The implementation of Operation 1005 at Szebnie concentration camp followed from the direct instigation of SSPF Scherner (“SS and police leader” Julian Scherner); the bodies were exhumed from a potato field and eliminated. It was the same at the Heidelager forced labor camp at the village of Pusków near Dębica, where the burning of all bodies began in the summer of 1943. In Tarnów – which had the district’s second-largest ghetto after Krakow – local 1005 deputies (whose previous supervisory duties had included participation in mass murder) ensured the elimination of criminal evidence. Deployments of the mobile 1005 commando led by SS-Untersturmführer Franz Schmidt are also documented for the mass grave clearances in the spring of 1944 at Przemyśl, Jarosław, Ustrzyki Dolne, Sanok, Reichshof (aka Rzeszów), Glogau and Jasło. This list cannot be anywhere near complete and will be continually expanded through further intensive investigations – so long as the political will exists and the relevant resources are available.

Conclusion

Today we know that the seemingly absurd order to clear out *every* gravesite was in fact partially achieved. The victims were often faceless and without identity. We know that they included men, women and children, but that is all we know about them. There is often no place of grieving or remembrance today, as it is difficult to detect the exact crime sites after the cleanup of Operation 1005. Moreover, so-called revisionists have also benefited from Operation 1005, as its results helped them to minimize the extent of the genocide and even to deny it completely, a denial made even easier

because the investigation reports of the Extraordinary State Commission came from the NKVD. And the perpetrators themselves? Only a few of the men in charge of Operation 1005 have been identified so far, and even fewer were convicted. Lower-ranking participants were often classified simply as witnesses, or as persons themselves oppressed by the Nazi regime. In post-war West Germany, they continued to serve as ordinary policemen, claiming all the privileges accorded to public servants. For the historian, this fact underscores – if one might be permitted to say – feelings of bitterness and weariness and the conviction that true evil really does exist.

Caroline Sturdy Colls

Learning from the Present to Understand the Past: Forensic and Archaeological Approaches to Sites of the Holocaust

Over the last fifteen years, forensic archaeologists have developed innovative and systematic methodologies in the search for and recovery of buried remains.¹ In the investigation of mass graves of recent conflict, forensic archaeology has played a central role.² Elsewhere, the value of using forensic archaeological methods in long-term, no-body murder investigations and cold case reviews has been recognised.³ However, forensic archaeology is only a recognised discipline in a handful of countries throughout the world, and the methods and techniques employed by experts in this area have not been widely applied to the investigation of Holocaust Killing Sites.⁴ This is in spite of the fact that Holocaust Killing Sites should also be considered to be crime scenes. Although a significant amount of time has passed since these crimes were perpetrated, evidence will remain within the landscapes where they occurred. These landscapes and associated evidence are incredibly diverse. At macro-level, the geography and topography of Europe was permanently modified by the creation of camps, ghettos, infrastructure and slave-labor sites, and the burial and disposal of victims in individual and mass graves. At micro-level, subtle traces survive in the landscape in the form of earthworks, vegetation change, topographic indi-

- 1 John Hunter/Barrie Simpson/Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Forensic Approaches to Buried Remains*, London: John Wiley & Sons 2013.
- 2 For examples see Margaret Cox/Ambika Flavel/Ian Hanson/Joanna Laver/Roland Wessling (eds.), *The Scientific Investigation of Mass Graves. Towards Protocols and Standard Operating Procedures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007; Soren Blau/Douglas Ubelaker, *Handbook of Forensic Anthropology and Archaeology*, Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc. 2011.
- 3 Hunter et al, *Forensic Approaches to Buried Remains*, ch. 5.
- 4 For an overview of previous examinations of Holocaust sites by archaeologists see Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies. Approaches and Future Directions*, New York: Springer 2013.

cators and other trace evidence. Many sites have been forgotten or become dilapidated since the end of the Second World War and this evidence has been overlooked. This is particularly true of isolated mass graves and Killing Sites, but it is also the reality in the case of some of the camps where larger-scale massacres and ill-treatment occurred.

This paper will outline the potential for novel forensic archaeological approaches to be used to locate and search these sites in order to identify evidence of Nazi crimes. It will be shown how a combination of forensic and archaeological methods has been successfully applied at a number of Holocaust sites across Europe in order to locate mass graves and other evidence of atrocity. The variety of state-of-the-art techniques and innovative methods now available will be presented and suggestions for future work will be made. In particular, proposals for a central database of Holocaust mass grave sites will be presented. Ethical working practices will also be discussed, given the need to carry out detailed scientific enquiry whilst respecting the sensitive nature of the evidence being sought.

Ethical Issues And Approaches To Holocaust Archaeology

First and foremost the Holocaust should be viewed as an overwhelming act of evil – as a crime against humanity. Despite its significance, and the impact that these crimes had (and continue to have) across the world, there have been only a limited number of attempts in recent years by forensic investigators and archaeologists to utilise their skills to increase understanding of this period of history⁵. This seems difficult to comprehend given the scale and seriousness of the events. Additionally, despite the fact that well-established protocols have emerged in the last thirty years concerning the search for and recovery of victims of genocide, these methodologies have also not been intensively used to investigate the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime. Over the last decade, an increasing number of Holocaust sites have been examined by archaeologists and others, but the focus of the methodologies used has remained on invasive methods such as excavation or coring. In some cases, these methods have been deemed inappropriate or unethical, particularly in instances where human remains have been unearthed. This is especially true of sites where Jewish victims

5 Ibid.

are thought to have been buried, due to the fact that Halachic law forbids the disturbance of human remains under most circumstances.⁶ These previous investigations have firmly implanted the idea that archaeology represents a destructive process that focuses only upon excavation. In many cases, those new to “Holocaust archaeology” have failed to consider the sensitivities surrounding the analysis of physical evidence pertaining to this period.

During the author’s own research in this area, it became apparent that the failure to develop methodologies for addressing these political, social, ethical and religious sensitivities has resulted in a paucity of investigations aimed at locating the physical evidence from this period.⁷ Although the Holocaust may be distant in time, its after-effects continue to be felt and it remains lodged between history and memory. Archaeological excavation in particular can be viewed – physically and metaphorically – as digging up painful memories of the past and may bring to the fore, in a very visible fashion, particular aspects of the past that perhaps some people would rather forget. Therefore, any work (archaeological or otherwise) that focuses on the physical evidence of this period must acknowledge that Holocaust sites are not only defined as physical landscapes and material remains, but by the often conflicting memories and attitudes that are associated with them. It must be recognised that sites mean different things to different people and that there may be many reasons why physical remains have remained undisturbed or unexamined for the last seventy years. Any attempts to examine Holocaust sites require a methodology that accounts for these sensitivities.

The Holocaust Landscapes Project

Fortunately, emerging forensic archaeological approaches, digital humanities tools and visual technology offer new possibilities for the investi-

6 A. Weiss, A monumental failure at Bełżec, 2003, <http://www.hir.org/amcha/belzec.html> (21 September 2007).

7 Caroline Sturdy Colls, Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution, in: *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* 7 (2012) 2, pp. 70–104.

gation, representation and commemoration of Holocaust sites.⁸ These approaches will in turn facilitate preservation of the sites (both physically and by way of record), produce materials to be used in education and genocide prevention, and enhance the information provided to visitors. Archaeology in general is no longer solely about the excavation of sites, and technological advances mean that, in some cases, excavation need not be carried out at all. These novel approaches to the physical evidence of the Holocaust allow remains to be examined in a thorough scientific fashion whilst accounting for the ethical issues that will arise when working in this field, as outlined above. Additionally, new methods in forensic archaeology offer the possibility to go beyond the simple documentation of burial sites: to explore these crime scenes as evidence of the suffering of the victims and the actions of the perpetrators; to use techniques in offender profiling to locate lost and unmarked sites; to analyse whole landscapes for what they can tell us about systematic murder; to examine graves in terms of how genocide was carried out and how attempts were made to hide the crimes; to find and recover human remains; to identify victims where permitted; and to provide both an account of their deaths and tell the stories of their lives.

Based on the author's acknowledgement of the need to develop ethical, non-invasive approaches to the physical evidence of the Holocaust, the Holocaust Landscapes Project was developed in 2007.⁹ This project began as masters and doctoral research and continues as an active research project involving staff and students from Staffordshire University and a number of international partners. This project is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on techniques and expertise from archaeology, history, geography, forensic science, engineering, computing, memory studies and a variety of other disciplines. Research at specific sites centers on the collection and integra-

- 8 For examples see Cristina Corsi/Božidar Slapšak/Frank Vermeulen (eds.), *Good Practice in Archaeological Diagnostics*, New York: Springer 2013; Eugene Ch'ng/Vince Gaffney/Henry Chapman, *Visual Heritage in the Digital Age*, New York: Springer 2013; Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies. Approaches and Future Directions*, chs. 6–9 and 12.
- 9 Centre of Archaeology. Holocaust Landscapes Project. 2014, <http://blogs.staffs.ac.uk/archaeology/projects/holocaust-landscapes> (23 April 2014); Caroline Sturdy Colls, *The Archaeology of the Holocaust*, in: *British Archaeology* 130 (2013), pp. 50–53.

tion of documentary, cartographic and physical evidence, as will be outlined in more detail below. As well as revealing information about the past, archaeology can also tell us about the present and teach us valuable lessons for the future. Archaeology is about identifying layers that reveal information about events and interactions. Archaeological investigation has a key role to play in examining the physical evidence relating to historic crimes and assessing the competing memories that exist in association with it. Because of the latter, it is entirely possible that physical evidence may have been manipulated – however, archaeologists can assess the level of manipulation, identify the surviving evidence and reveal new information about both the historical event itself, and the memories and attitudes pertaining to it.

The Holocaust Landscapes Project has involved visits to many sites across Europe, although to date three sites have been the focus of intensive fieldwork. For all of these sites, before any investigation took place, research was undertaken regarding the political, social, religious and ethical issues that have unquestionably shaped their current appearance. These specific sites were selected as they demonstrate the diversity of the Holocaust:

Treblinka Extermination and Labor Camps, Poland: The first investigation areas are the extermination and labor camps at Treblinka in Poland, where a six-year project has helped map the layout of the camps and locate evidence of structures and mass graves previously thought destroyed. This project has also focused on the areas outside the camp boundaries in order to locate unmarked mass graves and execution sites located in the surrounding woodland.¹⁰

Staro Sajmište, Serbia: The second investigation area is Staro Sajmište – a former camp for Jews and political prisoners in Belgrade, Serbia where the victims were murdered in gas vans. Here, the common narrative of the site is dominated by recent political events. Now defined by residential areas, workshops and commercial buildings, and even a Roma camp, this

10 Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Birmingham 2012; Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Finding Treblinka: Archaeological Evaluation*. Unpublished Fieldwork Report. Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University 2014.

site can be described as a Living Death Camp; a place which has had multiple lives after it ceased to be used as a camp.¹¹

Alderney, Channel Islands: The third area of study is the complex of SS and labor camps, associated fortifications and mass graves on the island of Alderney in the Channel Islands.¹² Here workers were murdered at various locations across the island – sometimes systematically, sometimes in an ad hoc fashion and sometimes as a result of the work they were tasked with. Here, rather than seeing the fortifications the workers were constructing solely as military installations, we should view these structures as the products of slave labor and Killing Sites in themselves – their location can also often provide clues as to where mass graves may be located.¹³

In addition, a number of on-going and planned *location-based* projects are underway:

- Desk-based searches and fieldwork at sites of suspected mass graves throughout Eastern Europe, most often at the request of relatives;
- Research into the use of Jewish cemeteries as execution sites, specifically in Poland;
- Geophysical surveys of Killing Sites in Poland and “community archaeology” (in collaboration with the Office of the Chief Rabbi of Poland)

Alongside this, on-going and planned *themed* research is being undertaken in a number of key areas in order to develop a sub-discipline of Holocaust archaeology, thus accounting for the sensitivities and challenges surrounding the investigation of sites from this period. Key areas include:

- Ethical issues surrounding the investigation of massacre sites
- Community archaeology at massacre sites
- Development of remote sensing and hybrid surveying technologies

11 Forensic Architecture (ed.), *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, Berlin: Sternberg Press 2014.

12 Caroline Sturdy Colls/Kevin Colls, Reconstructing a painful past: A non-invasive approach to reconstructing Lager Norderney in Alderney, the Channel Islands, in: Eugene Ch'ng/Vince Gaffney/Henry Chapman (eds.), *Visual Heritage in the Digital Age*, pp. 119–146.

13 Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions*, ch. 10.

It is hoped that, as more work of this nature is undertaken, a large-scale survey of Killing Sites will take place, in order to create an international database of sites of the Holocaust. We will return to this point at the end of this paper.

Forensic Archaeological Methods

Forensic archaeology is the application of archaeological techniques in either a legal or humanitarian context. Thus its remit includes the investigation of recent and historic crimes for the purpose of pursuing prosecutions and with the aim of locating, documenting and often recovering human remains and physical evidence to provide information for survivors, their families and the public record.¹⁴ Forensic archaeology is not limited to excavation but instead includes a wide variety of techniques spanning the search for, recovery of and analysis of physical evidence. The author of this paper is a professional forensic archaeologist who consults for numerous police forces in the UK on search strategies for missing persons, and the location and excavation of buried remains. The methods employed in these scenarios also can be used in Holocaust-related projects, where camps, ghettos and Killing Sites can all be treated as crime scenes and may be equally diverse in terms of scale, the environment and the levels of complexity.

Documentary Evidence

Just as in forensic cases, the documentary evidence relating to the Holocaust forms a body of evidence and witness testimony that can assist in the search for graves, execution sites and internment sites. Returning to original primary sources as well as utilising secondary research allows this evidence to be assessed by archaeologists with a knowledge of offender profiling, construction processes, demolition practices and landscape development. Thus new questions can be asked of this material and, often, new sources uncovered. Often witness plans, spy reports or information provided by witnesses not deemed important by prosecutors or historians have direct relevance to archaeological investigations and can be a key part of devising search strategies. Various mapping and visualisation tools used by

14 Hunter, *Forensic Approaches to Buried Remains*.

archaeologists also offer the possibility to layer multiple data types in order to compare sources and overcome some of the issues caused by multiple conflicting testimonies.¹⁵

In order to understand the multiple layers of a site's history, researchers also need to examine and assimilate a variety of other evidence types before commencing an in-field survey: map regressions and satellite imagery analysis (to facilitate the analysis of landscape change, modification, demolition or erection of structures); the location and analysis of aerial imagery (which is georeferenced in Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to modern mapping data to facilitate direct comparisons between modern landscape features and potential remains relating to the Holocaust).¹⁶ When assessing maps, plans, aerial photographs, documentary evidence and the landscape itself, a forensic archaeological approach allows us to do so in light of the perceived motivations of the offender. The more information that is known about the crime, the more likely it is that a burial site can be identified: The landscape can be profiled and likely burial locations identified in light of the number of victims, whether the burial site is thought to be the place where the victims were also killed, the resources and time that the perpetrator had at their disposal, whether or not they were concerned about getting caught and whether the grave site is a primary or secondary site.¹⁷ All of these questions can be asked in the context of searching for Holocaust mass graves, or indeed any graves of genocide victims, even where the "perpetrator" is in fact an entire regime.

Field Reconnaissance and Walkover Survey

This work forms part of an initial systematic assessment and recording of the site and the surrounding landscape. What has been evident at the three case study sites examined as part of the Holocaust Landscapes Project is that much of the evidence at these locations actually exists in plain sight. On many occasions, the evidence has been visible on the surface e.g. as earthworks, structural remains, objects; for example at Treblinka where

15 For examples see Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions*, ch. 5.

16 *Ibid.*

17 For examples in a forensic context see Alistair Ruffell/Jacqueline McKinley, *Geo-forensics*, London: John Wiley & Sons 2008; D. Kim Rossmo, *Geographic Profiling*, Boca Raton: CRC Press 2000.

over 200 artefacts were recovered from the surface in under half an hour through a systematic line search of the woodland in the camp area.¹⁸ All of these findings can be recorded using highly accurate digital field survey methods and these find-spots can be compared to aerial images and maps. As well as providing physical evidence, this process also reveals much about attitudes towards the site in question and may highlight issues such as looting or the effect of the weather.

In the field, mapping vegetation diversity (stunted growth, abundant growth, species colonisation) subtle changes in topography, and changes in hydrology and ground moisture content may represent the presence of buried remains.¹⁹ These can all be recorded using highly accurate GPS systems and compared to documentary evidence such as aerial photographs and maps. Archaeologically, this type of evidence has been shown to exist from ancient sites despite extensive ploughing and other disturbances that may have taken place – therefore evidence will and does survive for Killing Sites dating to the Holocaust.

Mapping Beneath The Soil

In many cases where individual and mass graves or other buried evidence connected to specific Killing Sites are sought, a range of geophysical survey methods can also be used to locate and characterise remains below the ground.²⁰ Most widely known is Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), which uses radar pulses to record subsurface layers and anomalies.²¹ However, a variety of other methods also exist which examine different properties in the soil. Contrary to popular belief, none of these techniques can detect human remains per se but rather the disturbance to the natural soil layers caused by the presence of graves, structures and other features. It is the ability of the operator to interpret these anomalies and once again com-

18 Sturdy Colls. Finding Treblinka: Archaeological Evaluation.

19 Michael J. Hochrein, An Autopsy of the Grave. Recognizing, Collecting and Preserving Forensic Geotaphonomic Evidence, in: William Haglund/Marcella H Sorg (eds.), *Advances in Forensic Taphonomy. Method, Theory and Archaeological Perspectives*, Boca Raton: CRC Press 2002, pp. 45–70.

20 Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions*, ch. 7.

21 Paul Cheetham, *Forensic Geophysical Survey*, in: John Hunter/Margaret Cox (eds.), *Forensic Archaeology: Advances in Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge 2005.

pare to historical sources that may lead to the successful location of buried remains. These methods are entirely non-invasive and are useful not only in terms of their ability to search large areas where excavation may not be practical, because they allow buried evidence to be examined and graves located, even in circumstances where excavation is not permitted – such as for graves believed to contain the remains of Jewish victims.

Excavation

When excavation is permitted, it is of course the best way to confirm the total extent and nature of buried evidence. However, once again, the way in which excavation techniques are used must be based on a thorough consideration of religious beliefs, the wishes of affected communities and the overall aim of the investigation.²² In some cases, excavation will be carried out to confirm the presence of internment sites, mass graves or execution sites to facilitate the marking of a place and the commemoration of the victims.²³ In other cases, excavation may result in the recovery of human remains for the purposes of identification, drawing on DNA and anthropological analysis.²⁴ Advances in DNA analysis makes it possible to collect samples from remains where a considerable amount of time has passed since burial, when remains are well preserved and where comparative samples are available for DNA matching.²⁵ Choosing the correct method by which to excavate and recover human remains from graves is vital to ensure that contamination, which may prevent DNA samples from being obtained, does not occur.

Having reviewed the methodology undertaken as part of the Holocaust Landscapes Project, and provided some examples, two of the case

22 Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution*; Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions*, chs. 3–4.

23 For an example see work undertaken at the execution site at Treblinka below.

24 Marija Definis-Gojanovic/Davorka Sutlovic, Skeletal remains from World War II mass grave: from discovery to identification, in: *Croatian Medical Journal* 48 (2007) 4, pp. 520–527.

Eva Susa, *Forensic Anthropology in Hungary*, in: Megan Brickley/Roxanna Ferlini (eds.), *Forensic Anthropology: Case Studies from Europe*, Springfield: Charles C Thomas 2007, pp. 203–205.

25 For an example see Morton Erik Allentoft, Recovering samples for ancient DNA research—guidelines for the field archaeologist, in: *Antiquity* 87 (2013), p. 338.

study sites will now be discussed in more detail to highlight the benefits of different approaches in different environments.

Case Study: Treblinka

Seven years of non-invasive research at Treblinka has allowed the extent and nature of the extermination and labor camps to be mapped and the location of several mass graves at the extermination camp to be determined without disturbing the remains.²⁶ The latter can now be marked and commemorated, whilst remaining undisturbed. The methodology developed at Treblinka was created in accordance with Halachic law, following consultation with various authorities. In 2013, an airborne LiDAR survey was commissioned in order to examine the entire landscape of Treblinka. In particular, this research focused on the execution site located South of the labor camp that was previously inaccessible using other non-invasive methods. Airborne LiDAR facilitated the production of a 3D digital terrain model that, in simple terms, showed depressions and earthworks in the landscape.²⁷ This technique had the added advantage that it recorded through tree canopies and provided access to areas that were previously inaccessible due to the density of vegetation. Hundreds of features were recorded which related to the camps and the execution site, as well as to the period of Soviet occupation. Most significantly, this data revealed the presence of several apparent graves in the woodland to the South of the labor camp. Walkover survey was undertaken to locate these features on the ground and subtle changes in topography and vegetation were observed in several areas. Three areas were deemed most likely to contain mass graves. Because of the need to confirm the exact nature of these graves, and due

26 Various publications have been produced about the work undertaken at Treblinka, including Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeology: Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution*; Sturdy Colls, *Finding Treblinka: An Archaeological Evaluation*; Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Gone but not forgotten: Archaeological approaches to the landscape of the former extermination camp at Treblinka, Poland*, in: *Holocaust Studies and Materials* 3, p.239-289, 2014. The complete results of the project will be published in Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Finding Treblinka*. Forthcoming.

27 Simon Crutchley/Peter Crow, *The Light Fantastic: Using Airborne LIDAR in Archaeological survey*, Swindon: English Heritage 2010.



A topographic survey undertaken at Treblinka extermination camp as part of a non-invasive archaeological survey.

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to the wealth of information provided by the non-invasive methods, permission was granted to carry out small-scale, confirmatory excavations to determine whether human remains were present. Human remains were observed in all three graves, which contained the bodies of multiple individuals, and the grave measurements were already clear from the LiDAR survey. In all graves the remains were not in anatomical order.

Of interest to forensic archaeologists is also the way in which graves provide information about perpetrator behaviour – they can show evidence of preplanning, the motivations of the perpetrator; they reveal time sequences and may themselves contain layers of remains deposited at different times. They can also provide evidence of the perpetrators' attempts to hide their crimes and may, in some circumstances, reveal information to aid in identifying the individual and their cause and manner of death. The remains themselves provided evidence of brutal treatment. For example, some of the remains at Treblinka had cut marks consistent with sharp force trauma, whilst the configuration of all the remains showed a complete disregard for human life on the part of the perpetrators.

At Treblinka, the graves yielded some information about the individuals interred within them, even though the excavations were only con-

firmatory. Shoes that show evidence of multiple hand-completed repairs and severe wear tell us something of the life of the owner. Bullets intermingled with the remains reveal the fate of many but also act as evidence concerning how ammunition travelled during the war. Other items, such as those found in the area around the gas chambers, which were also surveyed and partially excavated, reveal personal stories relating to pre-war and wartime life, and collective experiences of the many women sent to their deaths.

Case Study: Alderney

On Alderney, excavation has never been permitted owing to the sensitivities that still surround this period of history for the modern inhabitants of the island.²⁸ Here, non-invasive methods have acted as a useful mediatory tool between local residents and the archaeological team, and have allowed access to sites that would otherwise have gone unexamined. As well as recording the various internment camps on the island, the research has focused heavily on locating the various mass graves thought to be present as a result of harsh living and working conditions, torture and systematic execution. Here, documentary records dating from the German occupation through to the modern day were examined in order to determine whether there was any truth to claims of mass burials on the island, something that has been disputed for decades.

Through archival research, a number of Imperial War Graves Commission and British Government documents were located that indicated that mass graves did in fact exist. In addition, thousands of aerial photographs of the island were examined and intensive searches conducted for death certificates and burial information from the occupation. Geo-physical surveys were also undertaken at a number of key sites across the island, identified through the desk-based research discussed above. This research has located a number of probable mass graves and has demonstrated that the Nazis attempted to cover up these crimes by creating a seemingly orderly cemetery where some slave workers were buried. Death certificates that did not match the names of the deceased in the cemetery, coupled with the seemingly haphazard order to the burials, stood alongside

28 Sturdy Colls/Colls, *Reconstructing a painful past*.



The gate posts of Lager Sylt on the island of Alderney. The former camp has been subject to a programme of archaeological fieldwork since 2012.

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aerial images of open pits and geophysical survey data showing large pits in the same locations.²⁹

As well as non-invasive examination of the graves, surveys of the fortifications built by the slave laborers across the island revealed further interesting evidence. As mentioned earlier, these sites are seen as the products of slave labor and (in many cases) as Killing Sites where prisoners met their deaths. Evidence etched into the concrete of these fortifications and in prison cells included names of the people sent to the island, religious markings and artwork – thus revealing what can be termed as an archaeology

29 For information on the research in Alderney see Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution*; Sturdy Colls, *Colls, Reconstructing a painful past*; Caroline Sturdy Colls and Kevin Colls. *Adolf Island*. Forthcoming.

of resistance – evidence that prisoners tried to literally leave their mark to show that they had been at each of these places.³⁰

A Record For The Future

A variety of 3D visualisation tools also exist to record the environment and the physical evidence found within it.³¹ These techniques can be used when excavation is undertaken or where only non-invasive methods are used. Some of these methods, such as close contact laser scanning, are particularly useful for recording human remains that have to be reburied rapidly but where there is still the desire to determine an individual's ancestry, sex and age, and evidence of trauma/pathologies.³² Where graves and Killing Sites are located, one of the key processes that follow will hopefully be the marking and commemoration of the site in question. However, it is also important that a long-lasting record be created to ensure that knowledge of the site is never again forgotten, to facilitate further analysis of the events to which the evidence relates and to provide opportunities for education and research. Because the information collected as part of archaeological surveys is so diverse, one of the key challenges is how to present it all to a wide variety of audiences.

However, a number of techniques taken from archaeology and the digital humanities now offer the potential to create such a record, and emerging 3D visualisation tools provide increased opportunities for the creation of complex databases, digital heritage tools and educational materials in a virtual environment. These range from the very simple – such as maps showing the positions and nature of sites connected to the slave laborers on Alderney – to complex 3D models that allow us to explore how the Nazis used the topography of the landscape to facilitate control over their victims, to dispose of bodies quickly and with little effort (e. g. through the use of concealed areas, ravines, quarries and the like), and to adapt their killing practices over time.

30 Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions*, chs. 9 and 10; Caroline Sturdy Colls/Kevin Colls/Rachel Bolton-King, Tim Harris, *Proof of Life: Graffiti Archaeology on the Island of Alderney*. Forthcoming.

31 For examples see *Digital Heritage in the Virtual Age*.

32 Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions*, ch. 7.



The area of the former concentration camp Semlin in Belgrade, Serbia. The area was surveyed as part of an archaeological survey in 2012.

© Caroline Sturdy Colls

Where aboveground traces of Killing Sites exist, this evidence can be recorded using a range of laser scanning and 360-degree photographic techniques. As part of a survey of Staro Sajmište (Semlin Camp) in Serbia, these techniques were combined with geophysical surveys and archival research to investigate and record the site.³³

Prior to the Second World War, this site represented a complex of buildings and convention centers called the “Old Fairground,” which was subsequently utilised by the Nazis to house prisoners before their death in gas vans.³⁴ Many of these buildings still exist today, although many have been reused in a variety of ways, and the area is now defined by industrial buildings, offices, artist residences and a Roma settlement. The data and the images from the scanning and geophysical surveys can be used to assess

33 Forensic Architecture, *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*.

34 Jovan Byford, *Semlin Judenlager in Serbian Public Memory*, <http://www.semlin.info> 2013 (12th August 2013).

the ways in which these buildings were used as part of the Nazi extermination process, the interaction between the past and the present (through the alternative functions of these buildings today) and conservation requirements. The scanning also captured the site at a specific moment in time and recorded acts of daily life as well as spontaneous memory making; a form of rescue archaeology, since many residents of these buildings have now been evicted. The 3D models also formed part of an exhibition in Berlin in March 2014 and will be used to produce a range of educational materials. The digital nature of this record is particularly useful, since plans for in situ commemoration of these structures are yet to be decided.

Various digital heritage resources under development as part of the Holocaust Landscapes Project integrate field data, laser scans, modern 360-degree photographs, historical information, witness testimony and interviews, allowing the layering of people's stories within the physical evidence. Stories and evidence from before the war up to the present day illuminate the various histories of these sites. Whatever forms of presentation a project chooses, it is vital to return to the human experience of places and events; the techniques employed, be they archaeological, historical, sociological or otherwise, are simply the medium to derive and provide information about the people affected by these events.

Conclusion: The Future Of Holocaust Archaeology

To conclude, there are now various new technologies and methods that can assist in the location of Killing Sites and the identification of victims. Many of these methods have been used to great effect as part of the Holocaust Landscapes Project as outlined in this paper. These methods can be drawn from forensic investigation, archaeology, history, geography, memory studies and a whole host of other fields. When examining Killing Sites, it is important that appropriate methods be chosen from this vast wealth of techniques that meet the scientific, commemorative and practical demands of the project in question. Whatever methods we choose, they must be ethical and they must take into account the beliefs of people connected to the sites in question. In light of recent developments in forensic archaeology, new technologies now also offer the possibility to record, analyse, interpret and present the Killing Sites of the Holocaust on a large scale. With the right combination of experts and a large-scale interdisciplinary commit-

ment to such a venture, the creation of an international, three-dimensional database of Killing Sites and the evidence pertaining to them could become a reality.

To date, there has been much invaluable work aimed at rectifying the lack of knowledge concerning the Killing Sites of the Holocaust. This work has taken various forms and has been undertaken by scholars and practitioners from a variety of different disciplines. As time progresses and the Holocaust moves from living memory, the amount of work will undoubtedly need to increase and this seems like the right time to be considering the idea of a central record of Killing Sites. This could (and should) be more than just a documentary record of sites; it could allow multiple evidence types to be assimilated as new sites are located and recorded. If such a resource were to combine both desk-based and in-field research, this would serve to present a fuller, more accurate picture of events and would offer new opportunities for commemoration, education and research. The creation of the resource itself could facilitate the identification of still more previously unmarked sites and, where forensic archaeological techniques were also drawn upon, new insights into both forgotten and well-known sites could be provided. Whatever form this record would take, it should be a resource for both professionals and the public alike. Realising such a project would facilitate the identification, commemoration and protection of many more of the Killing Sites of the Holocaust, thus providing places for relatives to mourn and remember, spaces to share stories and experiences, evidence of the actions of the perpetrators and opportunities to learn from the past to educate for the future.

Michael Schudrich

Jewish Law and Exhumation

The Hebrew term for exhumation is “pinui atzamat” – the removal of bones. It is something that has been known about for a long time because such things happened. The basic concept is that once a body is buried in the ground we do not want to move the body; that there is a sense that the deceased is the owner of his grave or her grave. So therefore in a certain sense ownership: If you want to get technical, we cannot touch someone else’s property. Now, on a more spiritual, mystical level there is the belief that the body is tied to the soul, so if we disturb the body we also disturb the soul somewhere in heaven. Exactly what that means, I do not know, but I certainly want to respect that. So, is there any situation or circumstances in which human remains may be removed? The answer is: Yes. The quick answer is no, because that is what we always say: “No you can’t”. But in fact there are certain extraordinary exceptions, particularly if it is for the benefit of the deceased. If it is for the benefit of the person buried in the grave, whether in a cemetery or a mass grave, then it may be permitted to move the remains.

I can think of two examples:

One was a mass grave that was discovered not far from Belžec. Not far from there, and the problem was that the mass grave was located at the edge of a cliff. Obviously Jews were murdered and buried in all kinds of different strange places and some Jews were caught, shot and buried right where they were and over the years with erosion, ended up at the edge of a cliff. And how did we discover this? There were bones sticking out from the cliff and bones were falling down into the ravine. We looked at the situation, the realistic possibility of reinforcing the entire cliffside so the bones would not be shifted. It was decided that nothing was impossible; but nothing was happening. Not to move the bones would have meant that they would continue to fall into the ravine, which would have been a further desecration of their memory. Therefore, the decision was taken that in this unusual case the bones could be moved.

A second case was not a mass grave and technically does not fit into this conference. But I would like to use it as an example: It was a pre-war ceme-

tery established near a riverbank. The river has now swelled and instead of being only 0.5 kilometer wide is now 1 kilometer or 1.5 kilometer wide. It flooded the cemetery. Part of the cemetery is now underwater, and there are bones coming out. And there is still an ongoing decision as to whether we are going to stabilize the river or to remove the cemetery.

Now I am providing these exceptions precisely to emphasize how rarely we intervene, what kind of extreme situation we need to have in order to say that it may somehow be permitted to exhume the bodies.

The much more common case is where the mass grave is in an inconvenient place. It is in someone's field, it is near the road, and so in fact when we want to move the mass grave we are not asking to do so because it is better for the deceased but because it is better for us. That is basically unacceptable. And I will also talk afterwards about what "unacceptable" means. But certainly if someone asks: "Rabbi should we move it?" I would say: "No, we should not." Now I think there is a further step: The only acceptable reason to remove a grave is when the grave is at risk. If we say that in today's Europe we have so little respect for martyrs of the Holocaust that we would move a grave because it is inconvenient for us, I think we are saying something very negative about our society. So I find it really important that we leave a grave site where it is, even if it is inconvenient. Because that is the level of sensitivity our society needs to have.

We had another case two or three years ago. The site of a former labor camp – a satellite camp of Stutthof on the outskirts of Gdansk – was sold. This is another problem, because when we are speaking about satellite camps, we are speaking about a lot of property and a decision that was taken by the local authorities that this land could be sold to an American paper company for development. And on the property the company discovered a mass grave. Frankly, no one should be surprised, as that is what you often find in former labor or concentration camps. Even though they were not death camps. There ensued a lengthy discussion because the company certainly did not want to have a mass grave on their property and the local authorities were not so keen on having the mass grave stay there. We really entered into a second part of this question: finding a way to speak to each other.

It is important for people to be aware of what Jewish law says and what Jewish tradition states so as to be able to articulate it in a way that everyone can understand. And so we began, well I began, a rather intense discussion with the local authorities and also with the national authorities in Warsaw, telling them that we should leave this grave where it is. We discussed

exactly how we would do this. And so while it took some time, the fact is the grave has remained there and is not being moved. I can speak about the details later. But it is not just enough for rabbis to say: “You can’t do it.” There must be from the rabbinic side as well as from the government and the local authorities’ side an openness to talk together and see how best to commemorate this death site, this mass grave.

Then we come to the question of whether there is a difference between exhumation and excavation. To exhume a body from the grave would be – according to what rabbis would say – a violation of Jewish law and tradition. Then we get into the question that we are dealing with at this conference, which unfortunately concerns rather gruesome facts. We are speaking about bodies that were buried in a grave, and we are speaking about burnt remains, and we are also speaking about bone fragments that were actually never buried and have just been lying on the surface for seventy or more years. As Caroline mentioned, you could simply walk around and find two hundred objects, not bones but objects, in a short amount of time, that had been lying there for seventy years. You can also find bone fragments. And we are speaking about death camps, not mass graves, because there were generally twenty, fifty, or a hundred thousand who were buried in the ground in our experience. But in the six death camps you can still find today (with the exception of Bełżec, which was properly commemorated almost ten years ago by the Polish government and the Jewish community) you still find bone fragments.

Is there a difference between bone fragments on the surface and bodies buried in the ground? Actually I am not sure that we have a lot of precedents for this. So an approach has been developed over the last several years as we – and the rabbis – have begun to deal with these rather horrible questions. And that is: Bodies buried in the ground have now acquired their place, have the sanctity of where they are buried and should not be removed. When it comes to bone fragments that were scattered seventy plus years ago and never properly buried, it actually may be a mitzvah, a commandment and a positive thing to gather them together and bury them. And I apologize for speaking of gruesome details but we are here to speak of gruesome things. So when we find that there is a layer of scattered bone fragments, we could permit this to be buried in a proper place. And generally we say a “proper place” is somewhere on the site. We do not want to remove them from the site. We are not keen to do so but there are times that this, too, happens.

For example, twenty years ago, bones were found in a sewage pump in Birkenau, if I remember correctly, and clearly they just could not stay there. They had never been buried and since they were in Birkenau it was overwhelmingly likely that they were Jewish. So we buried them nearby and the site is actually marked. It is close to the crematorium, when you go to Birkenau. Again, if bones are buried in the ground, we do not want to touch them. But those never buried or scattered on the top of the ground could potentially be moved and properly buried somewhere nearby. We do not want to start moving them off the site. Why? Because first of all they should be commemorated where they were murdered and second of all (and again, sorry for being gruesome) we are not burying the whole person and one must try to keep the scattered remains of a human being in close proximity out of respect for this person's life.

As I said before, exhumations – that is, taking bones out of the ground – is something that we forbid and we do not want to happen. But what about excavations? That is something different. Meaning there are different forms of archaeology, which involves digging into the ground.

The most common form that was and still is used in Poland – though not on Jewish sites – is where there is a drill, a hand-drill, that goes straight into the grave and pulls out a core sample. That is a complete violation of Jewish law and under no circumstances should this method ever be used on a Killing Site where there is a chance that Jews are buried. I believe this method should not be used at all; I do not understand how this is a sensitive way to treat a grave. But that is just my personal opinion. Another form is where archaeologists start digging beyond the boundary of where they suspect a mass grave is located; they dig closer and closer, and if they see bones, they stop. That method is interesting: We are not disturbing the bones. But how can you get that close and uncover, yet not disturb, the bones? In certain unusual cases we were not against that method. Please note that I did not say we permitted it. We were not against this method and that is also a way of resolving a situation: It was done under the supervision of someone from my office. And that was to make sure that the scientists remained fully respectful of Jewish tradition.

One well-known case that I did not discuss publicly for the first ten years is that of Jedwabne, and I would like to use it as an example of how rabbis, scientists, government officials and politicians need to find a way to work together. It can work. On July 10, 1941, the Soviet forces pulled out of a town in Northeast Poland called Jedwabne, and as the Germans were

entering, the local population murdered the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population, their neighbors. Jan Gross' book, "Neighbors," sparked a very big discussion here in 2000 and 2001 as we approached the sixtieth anniversary of the atrocity. And one of the elements of that discussion was that we needed to exhume the mass grave to see how many people were buried there and who really committed the murder. Because the belief was that if there were bullets it meant it had to have been the Germans, because the Poles did not have bullets at that time. And there was a big discussion, because there was great pressure to exhume the grave. And I said: "It is not permitted." Especially in this case, where we know that the perpetrators were not the Germans in contrast to almost every other place where this was done by Germans and their accomplices – this crime was committed by Poles. The Polish government therefore has an extraordinary responsibility to be sensitive to Jewish law and tradition. On the other hand, the Polish officials thought that they also had to be sensitive to what was being said in Poland and so I came up with the idea of what I called a "partial exhumation". Now of course there is no such thing as a partial exhumation. Either you do it or you don't. So the agreement was that the archaeologists would uncover the grave to the level where they reached the bones and then they would call someone from the prosecutor's office in the community and they would photograph it. And I asked: "Why do you need bones?" "Because we want to prosecute the murderers." So I said: "Okay, but you will not take the bones out of the grave. Let the prosecutor and whatever forensic criminologist come to the grave to look at the bones, study them, have the results photographed, whatever you have to do for the court procedure and then close the grave up". Now, we would have preferred that the grave had never been opened but at least if the grave is opened and none of the bones are removed, this is the smallest violation of Jewish law. And that was what happened. The only problem was that part of the understanding – and I think that I can speak a little bit more openly now because the person that I was discussing it with was the Polish Minister of Justice, who later became the President of Poland, the late Lech Kaczyński – so I did not want to say anything during his lifetime. There was a request that they would do what I recommended but I could not say it publicly, because they simply wanted to keep on saying there was an exhumation.

So, sometimes finding a solution is rather difficult. Because then I was criticized by the Jewish side for permitting an exhumation, which was not really an exhumation, but I made the decision that it was more important

to properly respect Jewish law and the deceased even if it meant that there were a whole bunch of people who were yelling and screaming at me. A small price.

And I also use that example to show that one needs to be creative in finding a solution and I have to say that, unfortunately, because of what the Germans did here in occupied Poland, we face this problem all the time. But almost without exception we have found a way to resolve the situation and to properly show respect and ensure the integrity of the mass graves within Jewish law and tradition. But always with the ability to remain open, discussing and looking at different possibilities. I would say quite importantly also: engaging. I would never want to come to a government official, whether local or national, and say: "This is what you have to do". That is a real losing proposition. And so if you say: "Well, let me share with you what Jewish tradition has to say and let us think together about how we can resolve it," obviously what always happens in the end is that the solution becomes their idea. It is very important when dealing with government officials and politicians, that they think it is their idea in the end. And thus I came to them and I found that almost without exception, we have been successful.

INTERNATIONAL PIONEERS/PROJECTS

Patrick Desbois

Yahad – In Unum’s Research of Mass Grave Sites of Holocaust Victims

The Yahad – In Unum Association

The name, Yahad – In Unum combines the Hebrew word *Yahad*, meaning “together,” with the Latin phrase *In Unum*, meaning “in one.” Founded in 2004 by Father Patrick Desbois, our organization is dedicated to systematically identifying and documenting the sites of Jewish mass executions by Nazi mobile-killing units in Eastern Europe during World War II. The objective of this work is to:

- 1) substantiate the “Holocaust by Bullets” or mass executions of Jews perpetrated outside of Nazi concentration camps;
- 2) provide evidence of mass executions to answer the Holocaust deniers of today and tomorrow;
- 3) give proper respect to the victims’ burial places and enable their preservation; and
- 4) disseminate and help apply the universal lessons about genocide derived from the work of Yahad – In Unum.

The work done by Yahad is based on the axiom that the mass killings of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators were not done in secret. Instead, the crimes were very often conducted in public, in broad daylight. Local inhabitants were almost always aware of what happened to their Jewish neighbors and, what is more, saw how and where they were killed.

Today, Yahad works in Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Poland, Moldova, Lithuania and Romania. Our organization has interviewed more than 3,600 eyewitnesses and identified more than 1,360 Killing Sites to date.

Yahad – In Unum methodology

Archival research

Since 2004, Yahad has developed a particular methodology:

Before we begin the on-the-ground search for witnesses of mass killings and the mass graves of the victims, important work is first completed in the archives.

The main archival collection we work with is the German Federal Justice Archives, which contain prosecution files on the trials of perpetrators. The archive's thousands of pages include interrogations of perpetrators, witnesses and survivors of the killings, and the conclusions of investigations.

A Yahad researcher works in Ludwigsburg to copy files concerning the regions to be investigated by a Yahad team on the ground. Then, in Paris, our researchers read through the archives, select the relevant information and translate it into French. The information taken from this collection is focused mainly on the organization of the crimes (which units participated in the crimes, who gave the orders, who was in charge of surveillance at the sites, and so on). It is incredibly rare to obtain precise data on the Killing Sites. Given the numerous locations where perpetrators committed mass killings, it was often difficult for them to remember the names of individual villages let alone the exact Killing Sites.

The second collection Yahad works with is the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission Archives. This collection stems from an inquiry led by the Soviets immediately after the liberation of occupied villages, town and cities. The aim of the commission was to establish the historical record in each location during the occupation: who the collaborators were, who the victims were, how many of them there were, assessing the damages and so on.

These files include: interrogations of witnesses, lists of victims, drawings of Killing Sites, forensic expertise and conclusions of the investigations. Thanks to USHMM, Yahad accesses these archives through a USHMM researcher who copies the files that concern the regions to be investigated. Then, just as for the German archives, our researchers in the Paris Research Center read, select and translate necessary information.

We must underscore the fact that each file for each town, district or village is completely unique in terms of the investigation quality and the quantity of the attached documents. We may have more than 400 pages



Eyewitness imitating the bodies pose of the victims lying in the ravine (Ladozhskaya, Krasnodar region, Russia).

Photo: Markel Redondo, © Yahad – In Unum

for one small village and less than 50 pages for a large city. It completely depends on the local people who were in charge of the original inquiry.

For a long time, people were skeptical of the Soviet sources and considered them irrelevant because of the inherent aspect of propaganda. Indeed, this skepticism may be valid for documents in which the number of victims was overestimated, but other information such as the locations of mass graves or ghettos have proven to be quite reliable. Nevertheless, the inquiries of the Soviet Commission are far from exhaustive. Additionally, not every file contains complete data.

Regarding our investigation in Poland, we work with the archives from the Institute of National Memory, which we access through USHMM. These archives were the result of an investigation led in the occupied territory immediately after the liberation. They also contain some information on relevant locations, which were documented by Polish scouts.

Unfortunately, as aforementioned, the information gathered in the different archives varies from one file to another and, as we will explain later on, field research is also undertaken to find Killing Sites that are not mentioned in the archives and to identify them as accurately as possible.

Fieldwork

A Yahad research trip lasts 17 days. It is conducted in one specific area. Given the huge number of mass killings, it sometimes takes six to seven trips to cover one region, such as Lviv, Volhynia, and Khmel'nitski regions in Ukraine or the Mogilev region in Belarus.

Yahad has four research teams, each composed of one interviewer, one historian, one professional cameraman, one professional photographer, two translators, two drivers, and two investigators. The latter are crucial because they are in charge of finding eyewitnesses to the crimes or people who know where mass graves are located.

There are three different categories of witnesses: people who lived close to the killings sites or “neighbors”; the curious, mainly teenagers or children who wanted to know what would happen; and the people forced to be present at the Killing Sites, requisitioned by the executioners to dig graves, transport the Jewish victims, to fill the graves and so on.

These are the people Yahad seeks out and interviews. Yahad interviews as many witnesses as we can, just as in the context of a police investigation. This process is particularly important when a site is not mentioned in the archives and the testimonies of local people account for the only evidence of the crime. For instance, in the region of Dnepropetrovsk, where there were dozens of Jewish *kolkhozs* (collective farms), Yahad identified many Killing Sites based on testimonies of local people. In the Caucasus, where the occupation was very rapid and where many Jewish refugees settled in dozens of *kolkhozs*, the historical data remains incomplete. The interviews and investigation in such cases are the only means of identifying Killing Sites and documenting the crimes.

The testimonies collected are cross-referenced with one another. When we have relevant archives, we crosscheck testimonies with the archives in order to state those facts that are clear and determine where further investigation is needed.

Typically, we first interview witnesses at their home and then travel to the Killing Site, where we reconstruct the crime scene. The people Yahad interviews often have very precise memories. First, we have to take into account that most of these people never moved from their village and many are still living in the same house as during the war. The topography of the few square meters where they have lived remains precise. Secondly, as psychologists and neuroscientists assert, witnessing a mass killing is a trauma and therefore difficult to forget.

Based on our investigation experience, we would like to remark on the Killing Sites we have identified.

Yahad's terminology on the Killing Sites

After a number of investigations, Yahad came to the conclusion that we could not classify the sites we had identified as “mass graves,” but rather as “sites of mass graves,” since it is very difficult to establish how many mass graves are located in one Killing Site. For instance, in Busk (Lviv region), in the Soviet Commission Archives, investigators spoke about a single mass grave. In fact, Yahad identified 17 different mass graves, found through a single archaeological investigation Yahad conducted in 2006 under the supervision of Zaka rabbis. Without forensic expertise, which is forbidden by Jewish Law, it is nearly impossible to determine how many mass graves are located in a cemetery, in a field, or other location.

In a village in Volhynia about which we had no archival information, a villager talked about more than 70 different mass graves where 2–3 victims were buried per grave. Respecting the Halakha, we were not able to establish whether this report was accurate. It remains an open question.

Moreover, in a single location there can be several sites of mass graves, sometimes very far from one another. In Belarus, in the Mogilev region, we identified three sites of mass graves in one forest. The sites are dozens of meters apart. Officially (according to the Soviet Commission and according to the memorial) there is one Killing Site, where three mass graves are located. According to our investigation, in this forest there are three sites. Two of them have one mass grave each, and on another site there are two mass graves. Indeed, according to two witnesses interviewed by Yahad, the second mass grave was dug because the first was too small. Therefore, with regard to this type of case, we prefer to state that there are three sites of mass graves.

Yahad typology on Killing Sites

We consider three types of sites of mass graves:

- mass graves dug before the killings
- mass graves dug after the killings

- no mass graves dug: victims were buried in natural cavities or existing holes: ravines, silos, mines, wells and so on

The following are questions and problems related to these sites:

- The first challenge arises in cases in which the victims were not only Jewish. For instance, in the Caucasus, or in Eastern Ukraine, different groups of victims were buried on one site. They might include communists, partisans, Roma and Jews. It does not mean that they were killed together; the site of mass graves of Jewish victims might have been reused later to kill and bury other groups of victims. Who takes care of the protection and memorialization in such cases? How do we define the area where different groups of victims were buried?
- The second challenge is the issue of memorials. In our experience, some memorials are at the very location of the mass grave and serve to protect the site, as in Drohobych (Ivano-Frankivsk region, Ukraine). However, this is a very rare case. A memorial may be close to the mass grave but not on the site itself. In Bakhiv (Rivne region, Ukraine), for example, there is a memorial on one mass grave; but other mass graves nearby are not memorialized and not protected. There is also the case where a memorial is far from the site of mass graves, in the wrong place. For example, in a village not far from Polotsk (Polotsk region, Belarus), a memorial stands at the edge of the main road, hundreds of meters from the site of mass graves.
- Another question arises in cases where victims were buried in pits that had been dug after the killings. These graves were mainly dug by local people to avoid disease or out of respect for the victims.

The question remains as to whether all bodies were buried. In the Smolensk and Bryansk regions (Russia) for example, as in many places, Jews were not killed in graves but on the site itself, at times in fields or in marshes. Due to the winter and the cold, the ground was too hard to dig. Therefore, corpses of victims remained at the site, unburied until spring. Due to decomposition and the lack of protection of bodies as well as the difficulty to access some Killing Sites (marshes in particular), it is impossible to know whether all bodies were buried in the graves eventually dug in the springtime.



Site of mass graves of Jewish victims in Tuchin (Volhynia region, Ukraine).

Photo: Aleksey Kassianov, © Yahad – In Unum

Another question, consequently, is where are the bodies that remained on the Killing Site? Moreover, the places are not typically memorialized at all and remain quite challenging to identify.

- Regarding ravines used as Killing Sites, the problem is that the bodies of victims were not usually recovered properly and therefore were not protected. It is incredibly difficult to locate all the bodies, since they could have moved as a result of time, erosion or rain. A memorial does not protect them from destruction or harm. Additionally, to cover a ravine or slope with cement as a form of protection is a very difficult task.
- When the Killing Sites are wells (very common in the regions of Crimea, Odessa and Mykolaiv in Ukraine), if these wells were subsequently closed or filled, the bodies are protected. But if that was not the case, the danger is that the wells (which are rarely used by the locals) can buckle or even cave in, as was the case in two villages South of the Odessa region, a dozen kilometres from Berezivka.
- When the sites of mass graves are silos, ditches or antitank-ditches, the first peculiarity is the large size of the mass grave. How could one now cover a 100-meter-long ditch with cement, as in Simferopol, for instance?



Site of mass graves of Jewish victims in Ladozhskaya (Krasnodar region, Russia).

Photo: Markel Redondo, © Yahad – In Unum

Moreover, silos are often located on private properties, fields or on industrial territories. How do we deal with this situation?

During our investigations, we also document the killings of Roma and communists, and identify mass graves of these groups.

The sites of mass graves of Roma are rarely commemorated and protected. The only memorials we encountered so far are in Aleksandrovka (Smolensk region, Russia) and in Koldychevo (Brest region, Belarus). The existence and location of the mass graves of the Roma are rarely reported in the Soviet Archives. The situation is all the more tragic concerning the identity of victims, as they were never documented in this territory. Yahad could potentially assist with an initiative for the protection of sites of mass graves of Roma victims, for instance in the Mykolaiv region.

Concerning the mass graves of communists or partisans, if these victims were not buried with another group, the bodies were reburied, mainly in cemeteries. If the victims were “mixed,” most of the time the bodies remained in the mass graves where they were buried during the war.

Yahad also identified sites of mass graves of mentally challenged victims. If the victims were all Christian, the bodies were reburied after the war, mainly in the local cemetery. The sites of mass graves of mentally chal-



Site of mass graves of Jewish victims in Kolosivka (Mykolaiv region, Ukraine).

Photo: Markel Redondo, © Yahad – In Unum

lenged Jewish victims identified by Yahad are not protected or commemorated (in Southern Moldova for instance).

In conclusion, our recommendations would be to take care of the sites of mass graves that remain in the most precarious situations and that could be subject to harm.

Currently, thanks to an agreement signed between Yahad and the American Jewish Committee, five sites are being protected in Western Ukraine: Kysylin (Volhynia region, Ukraine), Rava-Ruska (Lviv region, Ukraine), Bakhiv (Volhynia region, Ukraine), Prokhyd (Volhynia region, Ukraine), and Ostrozhets (Rivne region, Ukraine). Thanks to the GPS locations given by Yahad, thanks to the work done by AJC and the Ukrainian Holocaust Center, and thanks to the German government, these sites will be protected and commemorated.

We also recommend that the work of protecting and commemorating be done as discreetly as possible. If there were to be a public announcement of the protection of thousands of mass graves of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, the remains of victims that are lying in various private and public places may be desacralized, so that the territory's owner would avoid any perceived trouble.

Finally, we believe that the protection of mass graves should be accomplished on a local level. Local authorities and enterprises are very well placed to enable the protection of these sites.

Deidre Berger

Protecting Memory: Preserving and Memorializing the Holocaust Mass Graves of Eastern Europe

The Challenge

There are an estimated one thousand mass grave sites or more in Ukraine, where more than one million Jews were murdered by German mobile killing squads, army units and police, who swept through the country starting in the summer of 1941. In January 1942, German bureaucrats met at a villa on Wannsee in Berlin to improve government coordination in implementing the “Final Solution.”

More Jewish men, women and children were probably shot in fields in Ukraine than gassed at Auschwitz. This led to the virtual extinction of Jewish life in vast regions of Ukraine, including Western Ukraine, where many towns had a majority of Jewish residents. Sadly, this abhorrent crime has receded in public memory. The vast majority of sites are in desolate condition, many not even recognizable as grave sites.

In addition to a lack of measures taken to protect the sites, most have not been properly memorialized. Ukrainian experts estimate that memorials of some kind exist at about a third of the sites, many with little or no reference to Jewish victims. Other markers were set up on the initiative of families of victims, often in Hebrew only, a language not accessible to the local population. Property ownership on many sites is unclear, complicating attempts to create official burial sites. An additional difficulty in commemoration is the fact that some sites were chosen by the killers for their remoteness, often in forests or fields, to hide the crime, making them difficult to reach. However, it is important to remember that many shootings took place within the towns where the Jews lived, making the Holocaust a public and highly visible event.

The task of memorializing the estimated one thousand Holocaust mass grave sites in Ukraine and other parts of Eastern Europe is of paramount historical and ethical importance to raise public awareness of the largely for-

gotten mass shootings of Jews by the Nazis. Inspired by the work of Father Patrick Desbois, who in the past decade has investigated and recorded information on hundreds of Holocaust mass graves sites in Ukraine and other countries, AJC in 2010 launched the coalition “Protecting Memory: Preserving and Memorializing the Mass Graves of Eastern Europe.” Partners include Father Desbois’s Paris-based organization Yahad – In Unum, the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, the Conference of European Rabbis and the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe.

As a starting point, the “Protecting Memory” coalition embarked upon a pilot project to protect and memorialize five Holocaust mass graves in Western Ukraine. The goal is to create models of simply designed memorials that serve to perpetuate the memory of murdered Jews who are buried at the mass grave sites. The sites will be marked with memorial stones containing short inscriptions commemorating those who were killed. In addition, the sites will include historical markers with information outlining the stories of the Jewish communities obliterated in the mass shootings by the German occupation authorities, often with Ukrainian assistance. The many challenges dealing with protection of the sites begins with Jewish tradition, which does not permit removal of bodies, making it necessary to work with the sites in the condition in which they are found. This differs from centralized German war graves cemeteries in Ukraine, where bodies are gathered from numerous sites. These sites are often more easily accessible and located on terrain that lends itself more readily to construction work.

The Holocaust mass grave sites, on the other hand, present enormous logistical challenges, beginning with those that have buildings or streets built on top of them. For those that are overgrown and badly neglected, the clearance of shrubbery as well as construction work on the sites is complicated by the necessity of respecting the sacred nature of the ground and, to the highest degree possible, ensuring that no remains are disturbed. Due to the isolation of some sites, even those that are cleared are difficult to access. As there is generally no one to take responsibility for regular maintenance, some sites memorialized in the past were quickly reclaimed by nature just years after the memorial was created.

Another challenge for the memorialization and maintenance of mass grave sites is the lack of public awareness of the events that took place at the sites in the affected towns and regions. There are scarcely traces of former

Jewish life. Jewish property was confiscated, while few members of the Jewish community, if any, returned to their hometowns. Jews from other districts or other countries were sometimes shot at the sites, meaning there was often no local connection to the victims, and communist narratives about the Second World War and the Soviet victory over the Germans contained little information about the Holocaust. Therefore, although elderly town residents can often still identify the sites, there is scant knowledge in many towns throughout Ukraine of the history and life of the former Jewish population. There are today only a handful of organized Jewish communities in existence, meaning there are virtually no descendants left to care for the mass grave sites. There are often additional mass graves of Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, Polish victims of ethnic cleansing and casualties of German anti-partisan operations in towns throughout Ukraine that remain equally unattended, with small towns lacking resources to address memorial issues of this scale. The sites themselves range from dozens of victims to tens of thousands, dimensions that create nearly insurmountable challenges.

Teachers lack information and the subject of the Holocaust often plays little to no role in history curricula at schools, despite the fact that it is part of local history. The larger issues of Nazi occupation and local collaboration remain in good part unexplored, both on a local and national level. After the war, Soviet authorities recorded significant amounts of information about Holocaust shootings, however this material was difficult to access and often lacked specificity regarding the persecution of Jews. Communist government authorities promoted a narrative about victory over the Germans that left little room for mention of German persecution of individual groups. As a result, Holocaust victims were commonly referred to by the more general designation of “peaceful Soviet citizens.” More than two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union, material is broadly scattered in numerous archives, with no central register to help identify the location of sources. Access to relevant historical source material remains inconsistent, often dependent on connections rather than on open access to archives.

As a result of this daunting set of challenges, there are hundreds of sites of Holocaust mass graves throughout Ukraine that are neglected, abandoned and largely forgotten.

History of “Protecting Memory” Project

In 2009, the AJC Berlin Ramer Institute invited Father Patrick Desbois to visit Germany for the first time to present his remarkable work interviewing eyewitnesses and documenting sites of mass graves in Ukraine. In meetings with high-level government officials, he explained the significance of his project and the necessity of continuing his work until he and his team could examine as many grave sites and interview as many eyewitnesses as possible.

In subsequent discussions, Father Desbois mentioned to AJC the difficulties for his organization Yahad – In Unum to undertake the next phase of the project, namely, the protection of the sites and the creation of dignified final resting places. There was agreement that this task needed to be addressed by an international coalition of partners who could look at the wide range of legal, architectural, historical and educational issues involved in appropriate commemoration.

AJC thereupon approached the German government and parliament for funds to undertake a pilot project on the mass grave sites. There was immediate interest and rapid approval of a request to launch work investigating the initial sites, which were chosen in cooperation with Father Desbois. The project was developed in additional consultation with representatives of the Central Council of Jews in Germany as well as with the German War Graves Commission. The complex halachic aspects of the project have been supervised by representatives of the Conference of European Rabbis and the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe. Finally, the project was launched in close cooperation with the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, which supported implementation measures, and the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, which conducted the historical research and accompanying educational initiatives. Another regular consultant has been the VAAD, the largest Jewish umbrella organization in Ukraine. An international group of historians and memorial site experts, such as Uwe Neumärker, director of Germany’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, and Habbo Knoch, former director of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, provide expertise on historical inscriptions.

How is it possible to protect such sites? This was the first and most obvious question that needed to be addressed when designing the project. There was long deliberation amongst the coalition members of the best

methods to create protection of memorials erected at isolated sites. After discussion, the consensus emerged that real protection can only come by creating a sense of local ownership, with towns and cities electing to regain their history by creating dignified grave sites for their former residents and ensuring the maintenance of the sites.

In addition to the architectural and construction challenges, an ongoing series of educational workshops was planned to create awareness at the local level about the murdered Jewish residents. In workshops and seminars, teachers and pupils received basic training about Holocaust education. In a second phase, they formed working groups to explore in more detail local aspects of the Holocaust as manifested in their hometowns. Plans are for these educators and pupils to be the nucleus of a future network that will continue to explore local history. The ultimate aim is for local residents, including the younger generation, to take charge of their history and probe various facets of Ukrainian-Jewish life in much greater depth than has occurred in past years. To this end, a Ukrainian-language website is being developed that will compile the information coming from working groups on mass grave sites. The website is also intended to serve as a platform for the educational material that has thus far been developed, allowing material to be downloaded easily, shared and distributed for improved teacher and pupil access.

Obstacles to Protection and Memorialization

In the course of the project, numerous obstacles emerged that needed to be addressed in order to create appropriate memorial sites:

Determining the perimeters of sites and establishing boundaries proved to be a considerable challenge after so many years of neglect. An additional challenge were the Ukrainian stipulations regarding the use of local companies, which limited the use of firms with more highly developed scanning procedures related to mass grave sites.

After the passage of decades, human remains at untended grave sites are often pushed up to the surface or dug up, for reasons as varied as extreme weather conditions, shifting soil, foraging animals, and illegal grave-digging in the search for valuables. In addition, some sites were at times used as a source for construction materials, such as sand. The sand was extracted, shifting the soil at the site, which at times revealed human remains.

Overall, the mass of regulations determining planning and construction procedures was time-consuming and challenging to master, requiring the use of extensive local assistance.

The difficulty of determining ownership was a problem at some sites, for instance, in Ostrozhets. Here, most of the land was owned by the city, with a small corner in private ownership that only changed hands once the city sued the owner in order to force a land swap. The “Protecting Memory” project strives to gain government recognition of the sites as Jewish burial sites, with ownership, where possible, remaining with the local state authority.

In addition to these difficulties, there is currently no law in Ukraine that confers a protected status on Holocaust mass grave sites. In fact, there is no clear procedure for obtaining approval to create a memorial site for Holocaust mass graves. Procedures vary from region to region and even from village to village.

An unexpected challenge was the discovery that some mass shootings took place at or near then existing Jewish cemeteries, obfuscating the boundaries between those who died natural deaths and those who were killed violently. An additional problem is that many of the cemeteries were destroyed intentionally by the German occupation administration, with gravestones used for building and road construction. This makes it additionally difficult to identify those who died of natural causes prior to Nazi occupation and those who perished at the hands of German occupiers and their collaborators, either through shootings or maltreatment. Furthermore, sites such as Bakhiv and Prokhid were used as sand pits during the Soviet era, while others were neglected or even torn up.

While the sites for this project deal with killings of Jewish victims, many of the mass grave sites were used for successive waves of killings of various categories of victims, complicating the process of identification and memorialization. This has at times led to attempts to universalize the shootings, instead of addressing the individual events, an approach that can obscure the historical record.

The historical research has taken on ever greater importance in the course of the project, as more details about the circumstances and complexities of the mass shootings come to light. Building on the important research done by the team at Yahad – In Unum, both the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies and historians working in Germany have examined additional Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, English and Ger-

man sources. The research has resulted in a new compilation of information about the life of the Jewish communities on these sites and the ways in which the Jewish inhabitants were murdered. Nonetheless, historical gaps remain, with research complicated by factors such as contradictory archival information, varying national perspectives that impact source material, ongoing problems with archive access and the paucity of archival material, which was often destroyed or lost both during and after the war. These constraints mean that it is nearly impossible to document the names of each person shot at the site.

Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon us to work relentlessly with all available means and material to reestablish the identities of every man, woman and child whose life was prematurely extinguished to the greatest degree possible.

Steps to Protection of Mass Grave Sites

The first step in launching the project was to conduct topographical surveys of all five sites, followed by scanning with non-invasive methods that meet rabbinical standards, in order to determine perimeters. This was an essential part of the necessary documentation for local authorities to designate the sites as official burial sites.

Parallel to the survey process, there was an architectural competition in Ukraine among a pre-selected group of architects who had demonstrated interest in the project. The jury, which was composed of representatives of all coalition partners and consulting organizations, met in Kiev with the architects to evaluate the submissions.

The initial idea of one design with local adaptations at each site proved too inflexible. Instead, a different design was chosen for each site, an approach that proved more adaptable to the varying geographic conditions at each site. Those architects selected were offered training modules with a basic introduction to Jewish history and memorial culture. Upon completion of the modules, the architects were then asked to refine and resubmit their designs. Eventually, three architects were chosen, two of whom designed two sites each, in order to give each site an individual design. Designs were selected according to their appropriateness for the terrain and for the locality in which it was being built as well as to the nature of the location as a Jewish grave site. Criteria for the winning submissions

included use of reasonably priced and locally available construction materials, sustainability of design and ease of maintenance.

Initial ideas to pour concrete as a ground cover, in order to best protect the sites from weather, geographical shifts, animals and other intrusions, were not realized because of possible disturbance of remains that could occur when anchoring the concrete. Instead, a thick layer of various other ground covers were used, including gravel and clay shards. Ideas to create more sculptural elements were dropped as overly elaborate and inappropriate to the settings in which they would be created. There were extensive discussions of heights and materials of fences to protect the sites, with a balance being struck between barriers that would invite visitors to walk on them and higher fences that could be considered too monumental. Several of the sites have low fences or even minimalist markers that act chiefly as a visual barrier to prevent visitors from walking on the actual grave site. Other sites will have no fence at all and rely on the perimeter design to keep people from walking on the grave. Due to soil shifts in the mass graves that often cause remains to be pushed further and further away from the initial site, a generous circumference was planned for the sites, with minimal use of fences.

The five pilot project sites described below vary in size and topography:

Rava-Ruska

At least 4,000 Jews were buried in mass graves at a site adjoining the New Jewish Cemetery in Rava-Ruska. In December 1942, an estimated 2,000 people were shot directly on site, while another approximately one thousand people were killed in the ghetto and buried at the mass grave site. Among the remaining Jews in the mass graves are those who were murdered while attempting to escape the deportation trains to Belzec or who died in the ghetto due to exhaustion, hunger and illness. After the war, the local authorities had sand extracted from the cemetery and the adjoining land for construction purposes, before abandoning the site to be reclaimed by nature. Construction of the memorial and information site at the Jewish cemetery in Rava-Ruska began in September 2013.

Kysylyn

In August 1942, the approximately 500 to 550 Jewish inhabitants of the Kysylyn ghetto – a small number of whom had been brought in from neighboring towns – were transported to a field outside of the village, where they

were shot and buried in a mass grave. After the war, the mass grave was covered up so that it could not be identified, and the field, including the Killing Site was used for farmland. The necessary work to protect the mass graves and the construction of the memorial site began in September 2013.

Ostrozhets

In April 1942, a ghetto was set up in Ostrozhets. Jews from the nearby village of Torhovtysia were forcibly resettled in the ghetto as well. The murders of the Jews in the Ostrozhets ghetto began on October 9, 1942, when they were taken to a site next to or in the Jewish cemetery and shot. In the following weeks, Jews who had hidden were hunted down and murdered. Approximately 800 Jews from Ostrozhets and surrounding villages were shot and buried in mass graves at the Jewish cemetery in Ostrozhets. In the aftermath of the war, the mass graves remained unmarked. The land was used in part for agricultural purposes, while work on widening a road through the site may have severely damaged at least one mass grave. Construction of the memorial and information site began in September 2013.

Prokhid (Ratne)

In the spring of 1942, a ghetto was established in Ratne for the Jews from the town and from neighboring villages. In August 1942, approximately 1,500 Jews were murdered in the sand pits near Prokhid. In the decades after the war, the mass graves were left unmarked. Forest vegetation soon grew over the mass grave site. In 1995, a memorial stone was constructed on the edge of the forest by members of the Ratne community in Israel. Construction work on the new information and memorial site, with protective measures for the mass graves, will begin in 2014.

Bakhiv (Kovel)

At the outset of the Second World War, approximately 13,500 Jews lived in Kovel. At the end of May 1942, about three-fourths of the Kovel Jewish community was forced into the ghetto located in the old city, with another approximately 3,500 Jews in the ghetto in the newer part of the city. On June 3, 1942, most of the Jews were taken by German and Ukrainian police to the train station, loaded onto freight cars, and taken to a sand lot just outside the village of Bakhiv. About 1,500 Jews hid in town or fled to the woods. Nonetheless, within three days, more than 8,000 Jews were murdered and buried in mass graves in Bakhiv. In 1944, even before the end of

the war, a group of survivors erected a fence and Yiddish-language memorial around the site, markers that disappeared in following years. In the 1990s, a Hebrew language memorial stone was erected at this site. Similar to Prokhid, construction work is scheduled to begin in 2014.

Challenges Ahead

This project has raised a number of larger questions for us regarding the challenges ahead. Who can fund the enormous task of protecting and memorializing these sites, including necessary historical research? How will it be possible to gain to the greatest extent possible the cooperation of local authorities in order to facilitate the creation of additional memorials? Who makes the decision on historical inscriptions and who guarantees the wishes of the Jewish community in that regard? Once sites are protected, who will maintain them and with what funding? Should a central web-based platform be established to enable descendants to more easily identify the sites where their beloved family members were murdered and if so, with which organization? Will increased attention to these sites make them potential targets for desecration? What can be done to preserve the sacredness of these sites, including the prevention of state-mandated exhumations that contravene Jewish law?

Why, one might ask, should we care about Holocaust mass grave sites 70 years and more after the victims were murdered? First, so we have a clearer understanding of history. The mass shootings in Eastern Europe were the first stage of the Holocaust. Information about the shootings was a chapter virtually sealed off by the Iron Curtain and nearly forgotten in the historical narrative, due to the lack of accessibility to archival material and to the difficulties in collecting eyewitness accounts. However, it is impossible to comprehend the Holocaust in its entirety until we understand far more about the circumstances of the shootings. What happened during the last months, days and hours of the Jews murdered by bullets? What prompted normal citizens to redefine murder as an alleged contribution to a new world order? It took tens of thousands of people to carry out the shootings, as opposed to the “more efficient” crematoriums of the concentration camps that killed people with poison gas. This means that a far larger number of people were involved in the shootings than in the concentration camp murders, with potentially a greater amount of avail-

able documentation. Such information could help better understand the impact of participation in the shootings on the soldiers, their families and the society at large. A better understanding of the mechanisms that led to such unbridled sadism, divorced from all values of civilization, could help us understand at least in small measure some of the triggers to fanaticism and hatred.

We hope that this project will provide an impetus to a younger generation of scholars and researchers to examine more closely the mechanisms of the depravity and hatred that fueled a government-sponsored campaign to murder men, women and children in the midst of society. It can inspire pupils to learn more about the ways in which Jewish children were persecuted and murdered. It can help us understand some of the underlying patterns of antisemitism that resulted in the near extermination of European Jewry. Let us give memorials and final resting places to those cruelly wrested from life, with no one left to mourn, their memories scattered to the winds, with few perceptible traces to be found of their lives. And yet, perhaps, we have a last chance to allow the victims to reclaim in some small measure the dignity and humanity of the lives they lived. As Father Patrick Desbois reminds us, identifying and protecting the mass graves serves as a reminder that a war is only over when the last of the dead are buried. Only then can we begin to research more fully the stories of their lives and reconstruct the rich, textured world of European Jewry nearly eradicated through the maniacal plans of leaders without a moral compass. By recapturing the lives of those cruelly murdered, we reclaim Jewish history and identity. By launching more comprehensive research into the perpetrators, bystanders and victims, we contribute to a fuller understanding of European history. Identifying and expanding our knowledge of the victims of German mass shootings is a necessary cornerstone to reaffirm the core values that are the foundation of post-war European democracy.

And finally, by protecting mass grave sites, we shape the future of memory for upcoming generations that will have no more direct contact to survivors. We must bring to life the people who once trod these paths, to join their voices with the silent witness of the earth, stones and trees covering the sites of their murder.

Meilech Bindinger

Cemeteries and Mass Graves Are at Risk

The Lo-Tishkach Approach – Advocating Enhanced Standardized Pan-European Legislation

Case history: Holocaust Mass-graves at Kalnujai, Lithuania

In September 2005, on the invitation and request of John Carr-Ellison Esq, Manager of UAB Agra Corp., I visited Kalnujai and Raseiniai, Lithuania, to inspect a mass grave site that was located on agricultural land that his company was farming.

The site lies 300 meters south of the A1 Highway, 250 meters to the west of the grain driers at UAB Agra Corporation's farm center at Kalnujai, being 5 km south of Raseiniai (70 km northwest of Kaunas).

My initial historical enquiries¹ had shown that some 1,650 Jews from Raseiniai and environs, murdered during the Nazi occupation, were buried in a mass grave on a hill near Kalnujai, overlooking the A1 Highway.

Further research was brought to light: According to the Jäger Report,² between the 29th of July until the 6th of September 1941 there was a shocking total of 3,603 Jews murdered in the Raseiniai region alone.

- 1 Discussions with Lina Kontautiene, Curator at Museum of Raseiniai. Kontautiene has published material on WWII atrocities in that region of Lithuania based on eyewitness accounts. According to her research, some 1,650 victims, Jews of all ages, are buried at this site. These massacres took place during the second half of June 1941, the victims being from the towns of Raseiniai, Jurbarkas (50 km SSW of Raseiniai) and Tytuvėnai (19 km E of Kelme).
- 2 The Jäger Report was written on 1 December 1941 by Karl Jäger, commander of Einsatzkommando 3, a killing unit of Einsatzgruppen A, which was attached to Army Group North during Operation Barbarossa. It is the most precise surviving chronicle of the activities of one individual Einsatzkommando. The Jäger Report is a tally sheet of massacres by Einsatzkommando 3, including the Rollkommando Hamann killing squad. The report keeps an almost daily running

During my visit, I met the mayor of Kalnujai; Lina Kontautiene, curator at the Museum of Raseiniai; John Carr-Ellison, manager of UAB Agra Corp.; Stanislovas Keparutis, farm manager at UAB Pasvagra - North Lithuania; and a former native of the Raseiniai region who also served as manager at Agra Corp farm in Kalnujai for many years.

On inspection of the actual site, I found a mere 25 m² plot of land cordoned off by bushes, on which was standing a modest cenotaph memorializing the deaths of the many Jews murdered there.

Considering the documented number of martyrs killed and buried at this site, it was clear that the delineated area was not more than a token symbolic memorial with a commemorative monument, but could not possibly cover the true total area of the grave sites.

In an effort to fulfill the fundamental Jewish law of protecting Jewish graves, we carried out an independent examination of the immediate surrounding area. In this regard, I called upon the assistance of an expert in this field, Rabbi Moshe Herschaft of the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe (CPJCE). His investigation, carried out with the aid of non-invasive land surveying ground radar techniques, mapped the full extent of the burial sites. Herschaft established that there are in fact at least eleven mass-graves situated in the fields surrounding the marked memorial site.

The government of Lithuania is committed to respecting and preserving the memory of the Jews of Lithuania who were brutally killed during the Holocaust. We are also well aware of the good intentions on the part of

total of the liquidations of 137,346 people, the vast majority Jews, from 2 July 1941 to 25 November 1941. The report documents exact date and place of the massacres, number of victims and their breakdown into categories (Jews, communists, criminals, etc.). In total, there were over 100 executions in 71 different locations listed there. On 1 February 1942, Jäger updated the totals to 136,421 Jews (46,403 men, 55,556 women and 34,464 children), 1,064 Communists, 653 mentally disabled, and 134 others in a handwritten note for Franz Walter Stahlecker.

This report reflects very clearly on the plan to kill all the Jews, except those which were needed for working purposes; those were, as the report notes, “only” to be sterilized. Jäger goes on to state that “if despite sterilization a Jewess becomes pregnant she will be liquidated.”” There are many documents about the Einsatzgruppen massacres in the Soviet Union, but the Jäger report is one of the most chillingly detailed of them. The six-page report was prepared in five copies, but only one survived and is kept by the Central Lithuanian Archives in Vilnius.

altruistic individuals who have placed cenotaphs such as the one in Kalnu-jai at many mass-grave sites; however, the erroneous demarcation of the mass-grave site had left the majority of the sacred graves unprotected.

About Lo-Tishkach (Hebrew for "Do Not Forget")

Jewish cemeteries and mass graves provide a vivid focal point marking the destruction of Jewish communities and for learning the lessons of the Holocaust. They stand as testimony to the history of Jewish communal life across the European continent and are an important part of Europe's diverse cultural heritage.

Thousands of these sites lie unvisited and unprotected. Neglect, inappropriate commercial and industrial development, vandalism, theft and well-meaning but inexpert attempts at restoration are threatening to permanently erase what is often the only surviving reminder of the importance of Europe's pre-war Jewish communities. Without concerted action, many may soon be lost forever.

Set up in 2006 by the Conference of European Rabbis with the support of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference), the Lo-Tishkach European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative aims to collate all known data on Europe's Jewish burial grounds and to incorporate this vast source of information in an online database so that it is readily and easily accessible to everyone. This database³ now stands at over 11,000 individual records of cemeteries and mass-graves and when complete may well contain details on close to 20,000 sites.

A key aim of the project is to engage young people: encouraging their reflection on the values that are important for responsible citizenship and mutual respect; giving them valuable insight into Jewish culture; and mobilizing them to care for our common heritage. The project uses Jewish cemeteries – a physical legacy of formerly vibrant Jewish communities – as the focus of a practical activity and learning program to meaningfully transmit to younger generations the lessons of the Holocaust.

Groups of young people on Lo-Tishkach fieldwork continue to systematically visit thousands of Jewish burial sites in designated zones across Europe. These groups survey and report on the current physical state of

3 See <http://www.lo-tishkach.org/en/index.php?categoryid=14>.

these sites as well as gather vital information on local Jewish life, history and culture.

Lo-Tishkach was instrumental in developing a simple “traffic light” index classification of all cemeteries surveyed to focus supporters of preservation activities on the areas most in need. Over several years, we have worked with local and national communities as well as international supporters, including the United States Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad.

Data Collected. What is Next?

After the success we have had in collecting vast amounts of data, much of which highlights the need for adequate protection mechanisms, Lo-Tishkach is now focusing on advocating the implementation of pan European legislation that will serve to protect these sacred sites. Lo-Tishkach aims to guarantee the effective and lasting preservation and protection of Jewish cemeteries and mass graves throughout the European continent by engaging the necessary national and international legal frameworks to ensure this. Several research papers have been published⁴ summarizing the different national laws, international laws and practices affecting these sites, to be used as a starting point to advocate for their better protection and preservation.

Our ultimate objective: the preservation of Jewish cemeteries and mass graves across Europe as part of our common European heritage. To achieve this, our current project involves in the short-term intensive engagement with key stakeholders and the assembly of like-minded institutions on the importance of preserving a key element of our common cultural heritage: cemeteries and mass graves across Europe.

In the medium to long-term, fulfilling this objective will require the adoption of EU legislation that transforms Parliamentary Resolution #1883 from the Council of Europe⁵ into national law.

4 See http://www.lo-tishkach.org/en/index.php?categoryid=23&p13_sectionid=3.

5 Resolution 1883, <http://www.assembly.coe.int/ASP/XRef/X2H-DW-XSL.asp?fileid=18723&lang=EN>. See also Doc. 12930, report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr de Bruyn, <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/XRef/X2H-DW-XSL.asp?fileid=18710&lang=en>.

Situation Analysis

Our current objective is very timely in view of both the institutional changes taking place this year among the EU institutions and the important commemorations that will take place in 2015 to mark both the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and the 20th anniversary of the end of the war in Bosnia. We know for example that a major commemoration will take place around 27 January 2015 to mark the liberation of Auschwitz. The arrival of a new College of Commissioners and new European Parliament in Brussels provides an opportunity for a concerted outreach to raise awareness about these commemorations and the fundamental issues at stake. With turnover of almost 60 % of the elected members (436 out of 751 MEPs), the beginning of the new legislative term provides an excellent opportunity to build fresh working relationships with a wide range of MEPs. All this will be taking place in a Europe that has seen a rise of antisemitism, intolerance and political extremism despite efforts at the national and European level to deal with these scourges. Because of the ubiquity of these behaviors, it will be crucial to broaden Lo-Tishkach's primary objective into a multi-faith and multi-cultural platform.

Strategic Recommendations

Our plan aims to translate the specific concerns of Lo-Tishkach into a broader objective and association adapted to the diverse European policy community. As a first step, Lo-Tishkach will participate in, build on and take inspiration from events commemorating the ends of WWII and the Bosnia war.

In this context, where many faiths, cultures and governments will be seeking ways to mark their shared history and tragedies, it will be crucial to transmit Lo-Tishkach's specific aim to preserve Jewish heritage sites as a broader objective that resonates across cultures, religions and politics. Focusing on a shared objective will be essential to achieving our long-term goal backed by EU legislation.

It is for this reason that we will be seeking to form new alliances with other associations that have similar objectives of preserving cemeteries and mass graves, such as the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE), the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (Asoci-

ación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica or ARMH), the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and war veterans.

Coalitions and support from other stakeholders is crucial when actively engaging with the EU institutions. We will be taking advice from potential third party stakeholders on how to best establish contacts with supportive parties and build strong alliances. We would thus jointly identify potential partners (e.g. think-tanks, organizations, associations) with which Lo-Tishkach Foundation could co-organize some of its initiatives.

In order to develop an effective strategy, Lo-Tishkach will closely follow the agenda of important meetings, events and policy developments relevant to Lo-Tishkach (for example debates, parliamentary committee meetings, conferences, exhibitions and voting on relevant pieces of legislation) around Brussels that could gain stakeholder and MEP attention.

In order to help raise the profile of Lo-Tishkach among a wider audience and put the topic of preservation of cemeteries and mass graves on the agenda, we will be seeking to organize a seminar/policy conference at the European Parliament. The date would be set for the beginning of 2015 to coincide with International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January 2015.

Summary of Project Content and Objectives

- Maintain and develop comprehensive database of Jewish cemeteries and mass graves in Europe
- Survey and report on the current physical state of these sites and facilitate solutions to current problems
- Engage young people in learn-and-do (hands-on) activity to contextualize the lessons of the Holocaust
- Step up the campaign for the preservation and protection of Jewish burial grounds by advocating the necessary national and international legal frameworks to ensure this

Proposed Work Plan for This Project

- Continue gathering data from various international initiatives including from field visit surveys of the youth education programs. Provide

infrastructure, with multiple language capability, for public internet enquiry.

- Learn-and-do education program challenges youth to reflect on their heritage and their commitment to communal affairs. Develop change of attitude through formal lectures coupled with the emotional shock of exposure to the killing fields when collecting up-to-date condition reports and photographs of sites.
- Communicate site conditions discovered from fieldwork to interested parties, by publications and newsletter; facilitate specific works needed to permanently protect sites.
- Build a cadre of prominent support in each country to work with the local government, building agenda consensus with other faith representatives at a European forum level, lobbying the European legal attaches, EU commission and European Parliament to advocate normative laws to preserve and protect cemeteries and mass graves.
- We continue to work with communities, governments, institutions and other parties interested in having such information kept in a systematic format for academic research, public knowledge, cultural heritage information, conservation and demarcation of martyr and heritage sites.

Lo-Tishkach programs for 2014-15 recognize the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII overlapping with the Latvian presidency of the EU in first half 2015 and Luxembourg presidency in second half.

We are attempting to involve institutions such as the presidencies of the EU, The European Institute of Cultural Routes (EU and COE project seated in Luxembourg) and the War Graves Commissions of Commonwealth and of Germany to cooperate in a symbolic commemoration as well as to host an international seminar on educating youth in the lessons of the Holocaust.

Expected results and effects

Expected results

- Field condition reports and the index of classification identify priority sites and facilitate reaction.

- As the successor generation loses direct contact with Holocaust survivors, this program exposes young people directly to the harsh results of the Holocaust and germinates changes in attitude while teaching lessons about cultural heritage and civic responsibility.
- It builds momentum towards universal best practice on enshrining the preservation of heritage sites in law and as a responsibility of the local government to fund and protect.
- It keeps the candle burning through practical international events.

Effects

- Engaging the younger generation in learning about the Holocaust and its lessons for current society
- Stimulating the collection of information in the course of organized educational projects
- Online data storage and digitization of photos and old documents
- Exchange of best practice among educators improving the quality of teaching

Positive outcomes

- An external register of shared information to monitor local regions performance/interests through transparency
- Closer cooperation and shared responsibility with governments and other faiths
- Encouragement of heritage interest and visits
- Encouraging European Governments to adopt common/best legislative practices as standard in Europe for the preservation of cemeteries and mass-graves
- Engaging youth (independent of their background) in activity-based projects, building a sense of participation/doing something positive in response to the Holocaust and the abstract lessons to be learned in shared responsibility and humanity
- Identification of preservation priorities for vulnerable or disturbed locations
- Identification of those areas without data for focused, on-the-ground research work
- Positive public attitude for projects supported by the Claims Conference and CER
- Preservation of heritage where communities no longer are present

- Progressive accumulation of dispersed data
- Publication of field condition reports
- Remedial repairs of some endangered cemeteries and mass graves

The accomplishments of this project to date:

- Web accessible open platform database of Holocaust cemeteries
- Over 11,000 cemeteries and mass-grave records, over 9,000 town records, over 6,000 cemetery photographs online
- Nearly 100 different items of national legislation online
- Range of authoritative publications including regional field surveys of many of the pre-Holocaust most populated Jewish areas
- Attitude conversion of youth participating in fieldwork
- International public presentations
- The website, newsletter and publications are functional, concise and informative

Lo-Tishkach is respected by peer researchers, museums and tertiary institutions for its contributions to definition of terminology, “stop light” classification of the field condition of surveyed locations, reliable information and open sharing of intellectual information. In addition, it is valued for reporting the CER’s authoritative Jewish religious position.

The learn-and-do education programs have a consistent record of accomplishment proven with youth from Ukraine, Latvia, Poland and Lithuania. Feedback from educators as well as before-and-after attitude surveys among youth have refined the toolkit and successive program delivery.

Lo-Tishkach is distinguished by the unique Jewish religious authority (via the CER connection) that is being used to mobilize the advocacy campaign. Realization of Lo-Tishkach’s strategic role in the advocacy process – that although Lo-Tishkach is getting the relay team (of existing best practice EU members) up to speed, it will hand the baton on to EU Commission civil servants and bill sponsors from the Members of European Parliament to take the law through its various stages.

Our residual role will be as the pre-eminent technical authorities on Jewish religious positions concerning Holocaust cemeteries and mass graves, as leading scientific advisers responsible for maintaining the key database and in funding learn-and-do youth fieldwork data collection.

We endeavor to implement our action plan and hope to see positive change in the protection of our sacred sites in the near future.

Lea Prais

On Yad Vashem's Project of Registration and Mapping of Murder Sites of Jews on Nazi-Occupied Territories of the Former Soviet Union

The Mass Murder of Jews on Occupied Soviet Territory: Current State of Research

There is a monument at Babi Yar, since 1961 when the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko composed his unforgettable verses, not only was a monument erected but many memorial events and ceremonies have taken place in this “valley of slaughter” near Kiev.

Over the years the details of the Nazi murder of the Jews of Kiev have been studied and documented. Babi Yar has become a symbol both of a major tragedy of the Jews of the Soviet Union and of the rejection by Soviet Jews of the state policy of denying the unique fate of the Jews during World War II and eradicating their national identity afterwards.¹

Despite its great symbolic significance, Babi Yar remains an exception. Even with the beginning of historical research on the Holocaust in the Former Soviet Union this topic has largely remained unexplored, with regard to the fate of the Jews who lived in the thousands of middle-sized and small Soviet settlements that were overrun by the Nazis.

Researchers have been aware of this situation. In the early 1990s, when previously inaccessible documents gradually began to be opened to them, the prominent Soviet historian of World War II, Georgi Kominiev, defined the state of research on the annihilation of the Jewish people in occupied territories of the USSR as “a blank spot.” He noted: “In studying this matter and researching it there remains before us a huge amount of work that has not yet begun ... We do not have available information about the Jew-

1 William Korey, “A Monument Over Babi Yar?”, in: Lucjan Dobroszycki/Jeffrey S. Gurock (eds.), *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews In Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, New York/London: M. E. Sharpe, Armonk 1993, pp. 61–74.

ish residents of the Soviet Union who were annihilated on the territories that were occupied by Hitler's soldiers ... In my opinion the number of six millions is too low an estimate for the number of those killed, just as the number of those referred to at Nuremberg regarding the Jewish population that was killed on Nazi-occupied Soviet territory – 1,400,000 – is also too low a figure.”²

Furthermore, even when the study of the “Final Solution” did deal with the murder of the Jews residing in the Nazi-conquered territories of the Soviet Union as the starting point of the massive and total murder project initiated by the Nazi regime, in most cases researchers tended to ignore a number of major aspects. These aspects included the ways in which the Jews were murdered; the actions of the local Jewish leadership when such existed; and the reactions of the Jewish victims as well as the actions of the local population – which included collaboration with the occupation authorities on the one hand and cases of rescue of Jews on the other. Nor did scholars study the characteristics of the Jews in the prewar years as the background for understanding changes in the size and the social, political and other characteristics of the local Jewish populations that survived the Nazi occupation.

Researchers also failed to answer the crucial question of the total number of Jewish victims in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union. It did not seem possible to determine the numbers of victims in separate occupied areas and, therefore, in the occupied areas as a whole. This difficulty stemmed from the inaccessibility until the early 1990s of documentation related to the Nazi mass murder of Jews in the FSU.³ The opening of the former Soviet archives, which led to the copying of relevant documents and

- 2 Georgi Kominiev, *On Recent Research of the Period of World War II in the Soviet Union*, in: *Yad Vashem Studies* 21 (1991), pp. 203–204; on the state of research on this topic and on the broad range of Soviet documentation and the transfer of copies of Soviet documents to archives in Israel and the USA, see Shmuel Krakowski, *Documents on the Holocaust in Archives of the Former Soviet Union*, in: David Cesarani (ed.), *The Final Solution. Origins and Implementation*, London/New York: Routledge 1994, pp. 291–299.
- 3 See: Marina Sorokina, *People and Procedure. Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR*, in: *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6 (2005) 4, p. 802; Kiril Feferman, *Soviet Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR. Documenting the Holocaust*, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 5 (December 2003) 4, p. 587.



Yad Vashem's "Untold Stories" website.

<http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/index.html>

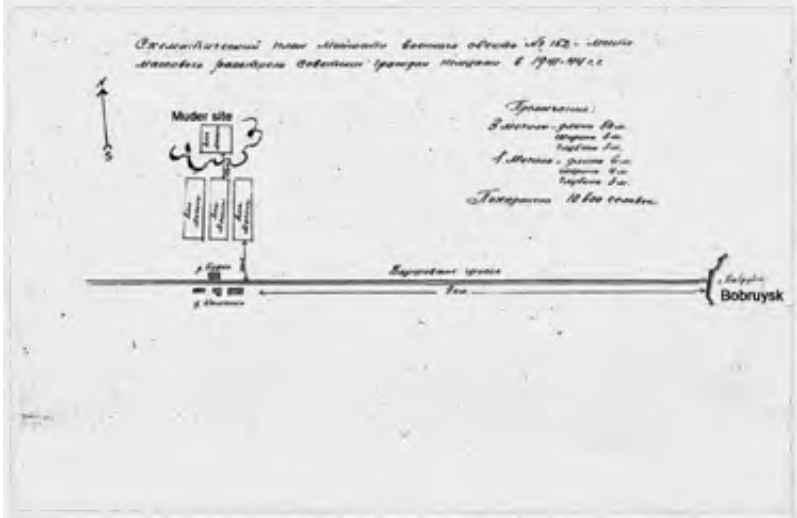
the depositing of copies in archives around the world, created both opportunities and challenges for historiographical research.⁴

Yad Vashem's "Untold Stories" Internet Site

This new situation provided the basis for a project relating to murder sites of Jews who had lived in Nazi-occupied Soviet territories. This project was undertaken by Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research in cooperation with the Yad Vashem Archive. Starting in late 2006 work was begun to create an extensive database to provide updated but, initially raw, information.

The present article focuses on "The Untold Stories," highlighting the way methodological problems have been dealt with and presenting some of the conclusions already reached. Although the Yad Vashem Archive collection already includes a very large number of unique documents, Yad Vashem continues to collect them while, on the basis of such documenta-

4 See: Krakowski, Documents.



Bobruysk, Bielorrussia, scheme of murder site.

© YVA, Photo Archive

tion, “The Untold Stories” project maps the location of murder sites and processes information about them.

As of now (summer 2014) the Yad Vashem database of murder sites and mass executions of Jews in the FSU has registered 2,387 murder sites. Every listing includes the precise name of the murder site, its administrative division (country, county and district), geographical location (latitude and longitude), the date of the event, the number of Jewish victims, the group identity of the perpetrators (and sometimes also of the officers or officials in command), brief information about the murders – including how they were carried out – and the source (bibliographical or archival) of the information.

“The Untold Stories” focuses on murder sites of Jews who had resided in middle-sized and small settlements in Nazi-occupied parts of the USSR – from the Baltic republics (mainly Lithuania and Latvia) in the North, through Belorussia and Russia in the center, to Ukraine in the South. Subsequent work on the on-line project has added several dozen murder sites. Further work on the website is being pursued intensively.

Due to the nature of the internet medium, murder sites were chosen for inclusion on the basis of determined by location, the types of sources

and the availability of visual material. The internet site is a synthesis of materials located in the collections and various information sources of Yad Vashem.

Each entry on the site has three main categories. The first section contains the site's geographical location and a brief history of the local Jewish community. The second provides details of the mass murder itself. The third provides information about commemorative activity at the mass murder site, both toward the end of the war and afterwards. In each category there is a historical summary that is supplemented by links to various types of documentation: lists of murder victims, official reports, written testimonies, excerpts from diaries and memoirs, letters, contemporary newspaper accounts, maps and illustrations, photographs, videotaped interviews, excerpts from films and "Pages of Testimony" submitted to Yad Vashem. This carefully selected array of documents creates a multi-dimensional personal and historical picture.

Our project presents a model for dealing with methodological problems. One of the first issues our team had to deal with was how to define a mass murder site. While the quantitative aspect is central, it is not the only element to be taken into consideration. Consider, for example, Berdichev (in Ukraine), a city whose prewar population of 62,000 included 23,260 Jews. The number of Jews killed at each of the seven mass murder sites has been estimated as having been between hundreds and 15,000.⁵ Thus there was obviously no question that Berdichev should be included on our website. In contrast, in Sukhari (Belorussia), a village with about 600 residents, including dozens of Jews, the total number of Jewish victims amounted to approximately 80. While this number of victims appears small, it was a large proportion of the Jews of the community and, hence, Sukhari also appears on our website. However, since we rarely encountered the question of whether or not to include a specific locality as a murder site, we decided to leave the decision of inclusion or exclusion to the researcher of the specific site.

Another problem related to Holocaust research in the Former Soviet Union concerned national borders. Specifically the question was whether to include locations from Polish territories, the Baltic States, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina that were annexed to the USSR between Septem-

5 GARF, 7021-60-285, Yad Vashem Archive, JM/19709.

ber 1939 and June 1940 or to deal only with locations within the 1939 Soviet borders.

However, despite the economic, social and cultural differences between Jews from the “old” Soviet territories and those who lived in areas annexed by the USSR in 1939–1940, their fates were similar: The annihilation policy carried out by the German occupiers basically did not distinguish between them. For this reason we decided to deal with territories within the borders of the USSR as of 1941.

Our project's use of documentary sources utilizes the generally accepted historiographical methodology that studies phenomena on the basis of a range of sources and perspectives. For example, we have compared German war reports with transcripts of war crimes trials and Soviet documentation, mostly compiled by local commissions immediately after the Red Army liberated those areas from the Germans. These documents were completed under the supervision of the national Extraordinary State Commission (*Chrezvychaynaya Gosudarstvennaya Kommissiya*, abbreviated ChGK) to investigate crimes committed by the Nazi occupiers on Soviet territory. These sources have been supplemented by others created during the war or after liberation by Soviet bodies such as the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee.

The validity and reliability of the Extraordinary Commission's reports, also with regard to the alteration of the number and identity of victims, have recently been questioned by scholars Kiril Feferman and Marina Sorokina.⁶ The German reports about murder operations conducted by units charged with the elimination of Jews also underwent a process of revision when submitted to higher-ranking officials.⁷

Being quite aware of the methodological problems arising from the circumstances of the creation and transmission of such official documents, the staff of “The Untold Stories” website often juxtapose conflicting information rather than select one or another version without adequate justification for doing so.

6 Feferman cites examples of changes in ChGK presentation of the number of Jews murdered and even of the elimination of the numbers of Jews killed, e. g., in Kiev County, (Feferman, pp. 591–595).

7 Peter Klein (ed.), *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion 1941–42: Die Tätigkeits- und Lageberichte des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*, Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Berlin: Edition Hentrich 1997, pp. 10–11.



Krupki, scheme of murder site.

© YVA, Photo Archive

In addition to the problem of different sources reporting differing figures for the number of Jewish victims, these sources also report inconsistent dates for the murder events. In the first case, the number of Jewish victims cited in Soviet reports is often considerably higher than those in German reports. A possible explanation is that, in contrast to the German reports, the information collected by the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission was intended to be used as evidence in war crimes trials, in which the number of victims cited directly corresponded to the gravity of the crime.⁸ Work on the internet site revealed that Soviet sources sometimes provided material unavailable elsewhere. In a number of cases, mainly relating to the territory of Belorussia (e. g. with regard to Logoyisk⁹), members of the ChGK included in their report detailed maps of the murder site.

Sometimes there are discrepancies between sources with regard to the dating of events. For example, with regard to Mariupol (Ukraine), which before the war had a Jewish population of about 10,000, the number of Jews reported by various Soviet sources to have been murdered there ranges from 9,000 to 20,000.

Sometimes, as was the case in Mariupol, there is also a lack of clarity regarding the precise dates when the murders were committed. With regard to Krupki (Berlorussia), German Report No. 24 from Einsatzgruppe B of October 25, 1941, it did not indicate the precise date for two large murder operations¹⁰, while a Soviet report dates one of them and contains sketches for the two murder sites, This is yet another example of how our project tells the previously untold story by combining details from different sources.

Another problem encountered when creating a website dealing with the Holocaust is connected with the bureaucratic language of the German reports. A similar problem is related to the language used in the Soviet reports. While the Nazis attempted to conceal the barbaric reality of their actions via euphemism,¹¹ the Soviet Extraordinary Commission concealed significant information simply by omission.

8 Sorokina, "People and Procedure," op. cit.

9 GARF 7021-87-8; Copy YVA JM/20009.

10 The Einsatzgruppe Reports, p. 206.

11 Jürgen Matthäus, Operation Barbarossa and the Onset of the Holocaust, June-December 1941, in: Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, Lincoln, Nebraska/Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem 2007.



Last letter of Eleonora Parmut from Priluki, Ukraine.

© YVA, Photo Archive



Eleonora Parmut, murdered in Priluki Ukraine.

© YVA, Photo Archive

The Soviet compilers of reports often avoided indicating the victims' ethnic identity – especially when operating in Ukraine – frequently referring to them as innocent civilians or as Soviet citizens.

In such cases, “The Untold Stories” established the Jewish identity of victims by the way Soviet reports indicated details of the victims' age and gender and also by chronology, i. e., by the period of the majority of mass murders of the Jews: the first year of the Nazi occupation of Soviet territories. Further sources indicating the Jewish identity of victims came from testimony in Soviet reports from local non-Jews or from Jews who had escaped. Information about the Jewish identity of the victims also was provided by German documentation.

However, in contrast to the reports of the Soviet commission that operated in Ukraine in 1943, a large proportion of the reports from Lithuania, Belorussia and the Russian Republic, compiled in 1944 and 1945, do refer to the Jewish identity of the victims. It seems that, with time, the general Soviet approach relaxed concerning the identity of the victims and, thus,

the members of the ChGK commissions increasingly indicated that the vast majority of them were Jews.¹²

Concentrated material about the murder of the Jews from the villages of Lithuania is contained in the well-known report by Karl Jäger, commander of Einsatzkommando 3a, who was the officer in charge of these killing operations. His report is essentially a concise chronicle of the killing operations carried out in Lithuania in the second half of 1941 and includes the name of the place where the victims had lived (but not the specific murder sites), the date of the murders and the number of victims, who in most cases are categorized by their Jewish identity, gender and age (adults and children).¹³ The reports of the Soviet commissions that operated in Lithuania add further information about the fate of Jews in some locations. However, the fact that the vast majority of the Jewish population of Lithuania was murdered and only very few survivors returned to their homes, as well as the deafening silence of local people who attempted to conceal their role in the mass murders, tend to explain the concise formulations of some of the reports. The sparseness of information regarding the Holocaust in Lithuania is particularly striking when one considers the great number of murders.¹⁴ In order to gain a clear picture of the mass murder of the Jews of Lithuania and to obtain details that were omitted in Soviet reports – with regard to the dates of the mass murders, the murder sites, the reactions of the Jewish population and the identity of the murderers – we had to rely on an additional source, a unique one: a group of testimonies collected at the end of the 1940s by Leib Konikhovsky¹⁵ that contains survivor testimonies from 171 villages throughout Lithuania, including the Vilna region; names the victims, the perpetrators and the local Nazi collaborators; names the

12 On the Soviet approach to the fate of the Jews as expressed in official Soviet publications dealing with World War II see: Zvi Gitelman, *Soviet Reaction to the Holocaust, 1945–1991*, in: *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, pp. 3–28.

13 YVA, O. 53/1

14 *Ibid.*, 426; Copy YVA JM/1843.

15 Leib Konikhovsky (1910–?) was born in Alytus, Lithuania. He was an engineer living in Kaunas (Kovno) during the war. He escaped from the ghetto and hid with a Lithuanian farmer until liberation in 1944. Between 1944 and 1946 he collected testimonies from the few survivors of the Jewish community in Lithuania. Afterwards, he continued collecting testimony from survivors in D.P. camps in Germany. His collection was received by Yad Vashem in 1989 and contains 1,683 pages in Yiddish, maps and illustrations, and 93 photographs (YVA, 0.71).

murder sites and includes sketches of these places; and includes accounts of the murders themselves.

Because of contradictions between individual sources and the scarce information they sometimes provide, no single source – whether alone or considered alongside another source – can be relied upon to give an accurate or complete picture. Therefore, one has to supplement as much as possible to increase the scope of documentation and compare information presented in different sources. Nevertheless, as a result of the total nature of the murder of Jews in many areas of the Former Soviet Union, the voices of the victims who might have provided information about the events were permanently silenced – with few exceptions. For this reason, considerable uncertainty remains, and apparently will remain, about many details of the mass murders.

Commemoration

In the third section of its entries, Yad Vashem's website provides information about commemorative activity regarding the Holocaust victims in the Former Soviet Union. Mordechai Altshuler discussed such commemoration carried out by Soviet Jews in the last decade of Stalin's rule. Altshuler noted the initiative taken by survivors to hold memorial ceremonies and to erect monuments at sites where Holocaust victims were murdered. These individual and group grassroots activities generally took place without official support and, sometimes, even in the face of official opposition. Communal memorial activities at these places of memory strengthened the collective Jewish national consciousness of Soviet Jewry.¹⁶

Yad Vashem's project updates Altshuler's research, revealing the increase of this commemoration trend in the four decades before the breakup of the USSR and beyond.

One outstanding example of memorialization was presented by the city of Bobruysk in Belorussia. There, the commemoration of local Holocaust victims began in the 1960s, when Meir Zeliger returned home after the war. Zeliger was shocked to discover pigs feeding at a communal grave in Kamenka containing the remains of Holocaust victims from Bobruysk.

16 Mordechai Altshuler, *Jewish Activity to Commemorate the Holocaust in the Soviet Union under Stalin*, in: *Yad Vashem Studies* 30 (2002), pp. 271–295.



Łachwa, murder site.

© YVA, Photo Archive

In reaction, Zeliger fenced off three murder sites of the Jews of Bobruysk. Later, when construction at the Yeloviki murder site disclosed a mass Jewish grave, Zeliger and other local Jews had the remains reburied in the local Jewish cemetery and a sign in Hebrew placed there. Further, Zeliger initiated the erection of monuments at the murder sites by raising funds from local Jews.¹⁷ Over time, the plaques on the monuments in Bobruysk became the targets of antisemitic vandalism, even though the inscriptions did not mention that the victims were Jews. After Zeliger's efforts, Maria Mints, who had escaped from the Bobruysk ghetto and joined the partisans, took it upon herself to see that the monuments were protected. They became gathering places for Jews on the annual memorial days, when they reaffirmed their Jewish identity.

Detailed information that local people gave to the members of the Soviet commissions, sometimes became a stimulus for commemoration. Conversely, the hundreds or more monuments and memorials located in many parts of the Soviet Union often encouraged further historical research, that led to the location and mapping of additional murder sites.

A view still common in the West, both among the general public and among some scholars, considers the Jews living behind the "iron curtain" to have been "Jews of silence": The Soviet regime succeeded in stifling all expressions of collective religious or national identity.¹⁸ Yad Vashem's "The Untold Stories" project reveals that the Jews of the Soviet Union – by collecting information about the murder sites of fellow Jews in various locations, and in their bold attempts to commemorate the victims – were not silent. It is now clear that even before the mass of documentation concealed in various archives was accessible, Soviet Jews were well aware of the tragic fate of the dear ones during the Nazi occupation and expressed this knowledge in various forms of remembrance and commemoration.

17 For photographs of putting up the fences, exhumation of the bodies and of the monuments in Bobruysk see YVA Photo archive, 7563.

18 For an analysis of the features of Jewish national identity among the Jews of the Soviet Union and the latter's connection to the Holocaust, see Mordechai Altshuler, *Judaism in the Soviet Crucible. Between Religion and Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union 1941–1964*, Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center 1980 [in Hebrew; an English translation will appear soon]; idem., *The Distress of the Jews of the Soviet Union following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, in: *Yad Vashem Studies* 36 (2008) 2, pp. 73–114; and Zvi Gitelman (ed.), *Bitter Legacy. Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1997.

Conclusion

The collection, listing and mapping of murder sites and the description of murder events on Yad Vashem's internet site is an ongoing process. It is mainly intended to cast light on the first brutal stage of "The Final Solution" as carried out in the Soviet Union within its borders as of 1941. Because of the immense territory covered and the widely differing cultural backgrounds of the various Jewish communities involved, it is important to clarify the features of specific locations in order to grasp the complexity of the overall picture. In this way, discussion of the major theoretical issues related to the Holocaust that the Nazis perpetrated in the Soviet Union is based on regional research, as well as a wealth of documentation, some of which had been unknown.

In conclusion, despite the methodological problems discussed above, "The Untold Stories" meticulous examination of individual sites can be expected to eventually enable us to gain a more comprehensive understanding than is available at present of the Jewish Holocaust victims in the Former Soviet Union.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Jacek Waligóra

“Periphery of remembrance” – Dobromil and Lacko

New state borders delineated after World War II have transected numerous roads and routes linking villages, towns and cities. They have transected numerous family bonds as well. This applies particularly to the border of the Former Soviet Union. In this case one can see those transections of roads and bonds with one's own eyes: a barbed wire fence and a strip of ploughed earth.¹ In spite of all those changes, remembrance has preserved the former names of places not used anymore. The road to Kalwaria is one of those places. The shortest route from Dobromil to Kalwaria Paławska used to go through Lacko (today Solanuwatka).

Katyn, Babi Yar or “Brygidki” prison in Lviv – all those places are well known from literature. In today's Ukraine, however, there are still numerous places that are little known or totally unknown. They are silent witnesses of tragedies that took place there during World War II.

Before the war, Dobromil was a county seat. It was granted its town charter in 1566. The town was inhabited by Poles and Ukrainians, including Christians and Jews.² On the 11th of September 1939 German forces entered the town, but by the 27th of September the area was bequeathed to the Soviet Army. The local administrator of the Roman Catholic parish wrote in the church chronicle: “Dobromil as well as the whole Eastern part of Little Poland up to San and Bug was under the authority of the Russians until the outbreak of the German-Soviet war.” On the 27th of June 1941 the Soviets left the town. The next day the Germans took it up once more. The Soviets came back in August 1944.³ Decisions made in Yalta ultimately left Dobromil and its surroundings outside Poland.

- 1 Though the Soviet Union no longer exists, the state border looks the same: a barbed wire fence and a strip of ploughed earth. In addition there is an increased control of the border zone – it is now the outer border of the European Union.
- 2 Leokadia Kurek-Grad, *Dobromil miasto naszych przodków*, Przemysł: Przemyskie Centrum Kultury i Nauki Zamek 2007, pp. 14 ff.
- 3 Archive of the Roman Catholic Parish in Dobromil, Register of Sessions of the Church Committee. Copulatorum. Register of items intended for the church of

It is very difficult to delineate the boundary between Dobromil and nearby Lacko. According to the 1921 census, Lacko had 1,221 inhabitants. In terms of religious affiliation there were 1,022 Greek Catholics, 173 Roman Catholics and 26 people of Jewish faith. In terms of nationality, 1,022 declared themselves to be Ruthenes, 187 Poles and 12 Jews.⁴ According to the 1931 census, Lacko had 1,201 inhabitants.⁵

Salt seams were the richest treasure of Lacko. A saltern had operated there for many years (possibly since 1564⁶), employing not only inhabitants of Lacko, Dobromil and their surroundings but also people from as far as the region of Cracow. This so-called Dobromil saltern was one of the numerous Galician salterns.

A few months after Poland regained independence, in May 1919, the Dobromil saltern, as one of the state-owned saltworks, came under the administration of the Ministry of Industry and Trade. It was managed by the Administrative Council and Administration of National Salinas. The entire output was sold to the Ministry of the Treasury by the "Bureau of Salt Sale".⁷

In the interwar period, the salt works provided jobs to about 200 employees.⁸ The salt mine had two working shafts and one drift. The "Korytowski" shaft was 3.2 x 1.7 meters wide and 231 meters deep. The drift was 180 meters long and 2.12 x 1.5 meters wide. It was designed to

the Latin rite in Dobromil since the beginning of my administration in Dobromil 19 X 1939. Rev. Władysław Surmiak. Short Chronicle of the church and parish of the Latin rite in Dobromil (according to the marriage notes) since the beginning of war 1 IX 1939. Chronicle since 1987. Entry dated 11, 27 IX 1939.

- 4 GUS RP [Central Statistical Office of Poland], *Skorowidz miejscowości Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [Index of Places of the Republic of Poland], vol. 13, Województwo lwowskie [Lvov province], Warszawa 1924, p. 8.
- 5 GUS RP [Central Statistical Office of Poland], *Skorowidz gmin Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Ludność i budynki*, [Index of Districts of the Republic of Poland. Population and buildings.], part 3. Województwa południowe [Southern provinces], Warszawa 1933, p. 31.
- 6 Edward Windakiewicz, *Solnictwo*, part 3., Kraków 1927, p. 20.
- 7 Adam Zdzisław Heydel (ed.), *Etatyzm w Polsce*, Kraków 1932, pp. 272–273.
- 8 Kurek-Grad, *Dobromil miasto naszych przodków*, p. 84.

supply water to the salt mine and to carry water permeated with salt to the saltworks.⁹

This place, so enriched by nature, became the scene of crime committed during World War II, in June and July 1941.

Under the Soviet authority the salt mine was not closed, but was operated under the administration of the Soviets. In June 1941, just before the outbreak of the red-black war (between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany) hundreds of innocent people were brutally murdered in the salt mine in Lacko and in the prison in nearby Dobromil. In this case human memory is the principal source of information. Very few eyewitnesses survived. There were more indirect witnesses but their knowledge was often subjective: they associated events rather than speaking about facts. The surviving documents – Soviet, German, Polish and Slovak – give only fragmentary information.

Two places so close to each other have been further linked: through the massacre committed in the Dobromil prison and in the salt mine in Lacko.

Events in the Dobromil prison

Before the outbreak of the Soviet-German war, the NKVD started liquidating prisoners kept in prisons located in the borderlands. This action was carried out in haste. Victims were executed in cells, in corridors, cellars or in prison courtyards. The prison in Dobromil was not alone. The “enemies of the people” were being disposed of this way in every prison in the area. In their haste, the perpetrators left traces of the crime, and witnesses survived.

Eustachy Pysaryk was one of the direct witnesses. He worked at the saltworks in Lacko. He was arrested and put in Dobromil prison on the 24th of June 1941. The cause of detention was rather mundane, inconspicuous: While grazing his cows he saw trucks heading for the salt mine. All such casual witnesses were arrested. The prison cells were overcrowded. A few hours later, NKVD officers began liquidating prisoners, shooting them to

9 Kazimierz Bukowski/Adam Jackiewicz, *Sól i saliny Polskie*, Warszawa: Dyrekcja Salin Państwowych 1926, pp. 58–61.

death in the staircase between the first and the second floors. The bodies were then dragged down the stairs to a pit dug in the yard.

When the door of the cell in which E. Pysaryk was kept with other prisoners was opened in the night, prisoners in panic pushed their way out towards the corridor. There they found themselves under fire. People were falling down – some in the corridor and others in the staircase. E. Pysaryk fell down in the corridor and was pinned down by the bodies of other prisoners. He felt pain in the region of his ear. He could not move, being pinned down.

NKVD officers were dragging the bodies down to the yard. When all the guards had left, E. Pysaryk crawled out from under the bodies and ran to the attic. Through a small window he reached the roof of the adjacent building (a police station). He managed to lower himself along a pipe down onto the wall, then crawled along the wall and reached a stable adjacent to the building. There he waited until evening and when shots died away, he ran home through the dark streets and remained there in hiding until the Germans took Dobromil.¹⁰ E. Pysaryk lived to be 79. He died in 1993.

Michał Mocio was another prisoner who survived. He worked at the saltworks as well. He was arrested on the grounds of the saltworks and taken to the Dobromil prison. His sister, Katarzyna, recollects that he was put in a cell on the second floor. After a while the prisoners were ordered to undress. They were taken from the cell in pairs to be shot in the corridor. After having been taken from the cell, M. Mocio felt a stabbing pain in the region of his temple. He fell down on his face, still aware of what was going on around him. He felt somebody's hands dragging him by his legs. His head was bouncing off the stairs. He clenched his teeth, desperately trying not to show any sign of life. While lying in the yard he saw the wounded being finished off. Before throwing him into a pit, a soldier leaned down over him. M. Mocio could hear him saying: "This one is finished."

They threw him into the pit. With one side of his body he could sense the ground and with the other – human bodies falling endlessly. As long as he was conscious he tried to dig himself out from under the bodies. Cold revived him from his faint. He could see the sky filled with stars. With immense difficulty, with what felt like his last breath, he managed to crawl out from under the cold bodies. Having escaped from the hole, he crawled up to the wall. He leaned against it and fell asleep.

10 Йосип Лось/Марія Прокопець/Дмитро Лапичак (eds.), Саліна, Львів 1995, pp. 115–116.

At dawn, Greek Catholic nuns who lived nearby appeared in the prison yard, found Michał Mocio half dead near the wall. Sister Isaja ran to fetch Doctor Kuśnierz. They carried Michał Mocio half dead on a stretcher to the hospital. His own sister could not recognize him when she saw him at the hospital: a man with grey hair and a face looking like one big wound (M. Mocio was 21). He spent six weeks in the hospital. M. Mocio died the following year. His family kept alive the memories of his experience “that bleached our brother’s head.”¹¹ Among the other survivors of the prison massacre was Dymitr Dwulit from Rybotycze.¹²

The above-mentioned witnesses who survived the operation of “unloading” the prison were all ethnic Ukrainians. Józef Kręta was one of the Polish participants in these tragic events. His statement, held in the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance, will be quoted here in its entirety, given its great value:

“I have lived from birth in Paław, commonly known as Kalwaria Paławska. I knew the husband of Zuzanna Sielska from Kalwaria, whose surname was Kubiak, but I don’t remember his first name. The Kubiaks during the German occupation – I would like to correct myself – during the Soviet occupation, since mid-September 1939 – were living in Kalwaria in the house of their relatives. Kalwaria is a neighboring village.

Towards the end of 1940 I began working at marketplace in Dobromil – I was collecting fees from the merchants. One day in June 1941 – it was a few days after the Germans declared war on the Soviets – I was coming back home from Dobromil, on foot. Dobromil was about seven kilometres away from Paław. I was accompanied by Kubiak, who also worked in Dobromil, in the mill. We left Dobromil and we were walking down the road to Kalwaria.

11 Ibid., pp. 48–51.

12 Ibid., pp. 48–51. In July 2014, the son of D. Dwulit visited the author. He wanted to supplement information about his father, who indeed survived the massacre. After the Soviets had returned in 1944, he had been arrested immediately. After the borders were shifted, the family was transferred to Biskowice near Sambor. His father died in prison. The family still does not know the cause of death or the place of burial.

Somewhere around one kilometer from Dobromil we were passing a salt mine, the so-called Salina. It was afternoon. A patrol of three armed Soviet soldiers halted us. They checked out our IDs, took us into the grounds of the saltworks and from there under escort we were driven away in a car to the prison in Dobromil. They put us (Kubiak and me) in a cell on the first floor. There were about 20 prisoners there.

Somewhere around 10 p. m. – it was already dark – the door opened. Armed NKVD officers told us to go out and led us down the stairs. I was followed by an NKVD officer with a gun in his hand. While I was on the ground floor, approaching the entrance door, through which the prisoners were being led out to the yard (so-called square), I caught sight of the NKVD officer I had known from the marketplace. I thought he could help me, because I was innocent, so I said aloud: 'toho tovarisha znayu' [I know this comrade]. When I did this, the officer with the gun who was leading me must have shot me in the back of my head, because I could hear a shot from behind me and I lost consciousness.

When I regained consciousness, it was pitch-dark. I cannot say what time it was. I realized that I lay in that so-called square. It was a piece of grassy land in the shape of a square, surrounded by a high wall. I could see bodies lying all around me. I could hear the sound of shots coming from inside the prison building. I was trying hard not to moan in fear of being finished off by the NKVD.

I was in a shock, thinking solely of how to get out of that square. I caught sight of a beam leaning against the wall, that reached the very top of it. I don't know how I managed to muster the strength, but I climbed along the beam to the top of the wall and sat on its edge. I cut myself on pieces of glass stuck to it. Somehow I managed to pull the beam up and put it over to the other side of the wall that is to the outside of prison. I started sliding down along the beam but I fell off and lost consciousness again.

When I regained consciousness, I realized that I had managed to get out of the square, because I had fallen into a vegetable patch. It was already daylight. No shots could be heard and I could see no Soviets at all; it was quiet all around there. I crossed the garden and approached a house with a porch; I knocked on the door, but a woman who was inside, locked and bolted herself in and only

asked through the closed door what I wanted. I said, that I need some water to wash myself. It was bright daylight and I could see that my shirt was stained with blood; when I touched my head, my hands became bloodstained too.

I was so weak that I had to lie down on that porch. After a while some people appeared. There was a doctor among them; he took me to the hospital in Dobromil. The house turned out to be a drugstore and that woman had let the hospital know that I was there, wounded. The doctor did not ask why I was bloodstained; they took care of me conscientiously at the hospital. I am sure they knew what had been going on in the prison at night; they knew that the NKVD had executed the prisoners.

That day the Germans entered Dobromil. I spent about two weeks in the hospital and then returned home to Paław. It turned out that the bullet went into the back of my head; luckily it didn't damage my brain, and stopped before the bone, just under the right eye socket, without puncturing the skin on my face. They did not remove the bullet then, and it is still there in my cheek.

My family visited me at the hospital; they asked about Kubiak, who like me had not returned home. I told them that he had been arrested, too, and had been taken out, so for sure he had been shot to death and lies somewhere in that 'square.' His body was identified by his wife Zuzanna and her brother, Sielski Bernard. The body of Kubiak was taken to Kalwaria and buried at the cemetery, but I was still in hospital then."¹³

Contrary to J. Kręta's account, Kazimierz Kubiak's relatives did not find him in the pit dug in the prison yard, but among the bodies taken out of the drift of the salt mine in Lacko.¹⁴ This shows that people murdered in

13 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [Institute of National Remembrance], Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu [Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation]. Oddziałowa Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Rzeszowie [Branch Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Rzeszów]. Files S 6/06/Zk, (from here on referred to as OKŚZ Rzeszów). OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Józef K., pp. 359–359a.

14 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Rudolf B., pp. 357–357a.

the prison not only were thrown into the pit dug in the prison yard but also were taken to the grounds of the saltworks.

Both K. Kubiak and J. Kręta were detained simply because they were passing the saltern – it was the only reason. The Soviets probably feared that they might have been seen murdering people there, a deed that should remain secret.

Like K. Kubiak, Bolesław Rymanowicz was murdered in the Dobromil prison. An account of his detention comes from his niece:

“It was a beautiful, sunny morning near the end of June 1941. My Uncle Bolek was strolling with one of his friends (I don’t remember his name) down Chyrowska Street in Dobromil. Along the way he stopped off at his sister’s, Janina Kalinowska (maiden name Rymanowicz) for cigarettes and then they went to the bridge over Wyrwa River. Then an aeroplane appeared over their heads and my uncle raised his hand. Some hidden Soviet soldiers noticed him and started shouting: ‘Shpion, shpion’ [spy]. My uncle and his friend were arrested and escorted under rifle butts to the prison that was situated next to the market square. It was the last day before the German invasion. During the night, enraged NKVD officers and merciless murderers shot to death all the innocent prisoners.

The next morning (I think, it was the 24th of June) my mother, Janina Kalinowska, having learned of the tragedy, ran in despair to the prison and we – two little girls: me and my sister Elżbieta – followed her in a hurry. One of the murderers, hidden under a long black cloak made of thick cloth or felt, ran out through the prison door and, paying no attention to us at all, jumped onto a big motorcycle with sidecar and rode off towards the cemetery.

The door was open so we rushed inside. The view was horrible: Many pools of blood under our feet, cells full of murdered prisoners. I can remember a dead man hidden behind a tile stove, another hidden under a wheelbarrow and two others hanging over the wall separating the prison from the elementary school. Among the dead we were desperately searching for our uncle’s body. On the right-hand side of a yard, right next to the wall, there was a huge pit full of bodies.

I was a little girl but I still have a vivid picture of this in my mind. I can remember the awful despair of my grandfather, Karol

Rymanowicz, and my grandmother, Maria Rymanowicz (maiden name Dołhun). Uncle Bolek, having been shot, was thrown into the pit and according to the doctor's diagnosis he had suffocated under the heap of bodies. I saw his scraped back – he must have been dragged along the ground. We were told that his friend survived but went deaf and became totally depressed.

My uncle was buried at the Dobromil cemetery – to the right of the cemetery chapel at the top. His father, Karol, is now buried next to him.

I remember his burial. A funeral procession came out from Mickiewicz Street (where the Rymanowicz family lived) to the market square. Then the patrol arrived – the German troops on motorbikes. When the soldiers saw the procession, they stopped and all took off their helmets. We were very surprised, comparing them to those primitive murderers from NKVD.”¹⁵

In the Dobromil prison, people were murdered not only with pistols or rifles. During the early phase of the “unloading,” a much more brutal way of killing was used: They smashed prisoners' heads with a five-kilo sledgehammer fixed to a poker. Executions were carried out in the woodshed situated in the prison yard. The prisoner put his head onto a chopping block and the executioner smashed it with one effective move. The executioner's name was Grauer (or Krauer); he was an NKVD collaborator of Jewish descent.¹⁶

This way of “unloading” the prison turned out to be unacceptable even for the prison staff. The prison governor told the NKVD commanding officer (Alexander Maltsov) that they should not kill people this way. Maltsov (NKVD chief in Dobromil) answered: “If you say so, you are the same as them,” and he shot the prison governor to death.¹⁷ Along with the prisoners, “unnecessary” witnesses were liquidated as well. NKVD secretaries were among them. These women were of Jewish descent. Their bodies were found in the court building adjacent to the prison. One of the mur-

15 Letter from H. Janowska (maiden name Kalinowska) to the author, 27th July 2012.

16 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Czesław P., pp. 38–40a.

17 Ibid.

dered women was pregnant. Their employers did not have mercy even for their own employees. The reason was simple: They knew too much.¹⁸

Even today we do not know how many were murdered in the Dobromil prison.

Murdering prisoners at the saltworks

In the case of the Dobromil prison, there are direct witnesses to these dramatic events. In contrast, what happened at the saltworks still remains a mystery. The inhabitants of Lacko, particularly those living in the houses situated along the road leading to the saltworks, knew that something wrong was going on there but nobody suspected that this enchanting place – the Dobromil saltworks was such a place – would become a burial site for so many innocent people.

The Soviets closed the saltworks. M. Mocio (mentioned above) was arrested when he went there to get his salary. Others obeyed the warnings that they should not go there, because they may never return.

People living in the houses along the road leading to the saltworks were told not to go out of their homes. The windows had to be curtained. Nobody was allowed to look out. All that because the trucks were carrying something to the saltworks. One inhabitant (in 1941 a 14-year old girl) did not obey the ban given by her father. Her curiosity won and she peeped out of the curtained window. She saw a foot in a red shoe, poking out from under the tarp over one of the trucks. A few days later, after the Soviets had fled, the girl went with other inhabitants to "Salina," where bodies were being taken out of the mineshaft. She met people from Przemyśl there. Among them there was a woman wailing aloud: "My God! They burst into the house, caught my son, did not even let him put his shoes on. They took him half-barefoot, in one shoe. In a red shoe..."

The girl came up to that woman and told her what she had seen a few days earlier. They started going through the abandoned clothes. They found a red shoe among them. It was the shoe of the woman's son.¹⁹ It was clear now that the trucks had been carrying the bodies of people who had been

18 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Andrzej K., pp. 47–48.

19 Лось/Прокопець/Лапичак, Саліна, pp. 45–46.

murdered. But where were they murdered? Nobody knew. The mineshafts became a place of burial: They were to hide the traces of that crime.

Niżankowice, Truszczyce, Hubyca, Lacko – these are villages along the road from Przemyśl to Dobromil (today in Ukraine). Older people have retained their memories of the convoy. The prisoners probably came from Przemyśl. Reports vary on the numbers of prisoners. One of the witnesses stated that there were a few hundred. Wasyl Fartuszek saw tired and frightened people convoyed under rifles: “They were covering the last meters of the roads of their lives.”²⁰

Katarzyna Lendziak remembered two of the escorted prisoners. While the column was convoyed, K. Lendziak was grazing cows together with her uncle. One of the prisoners shouted at him: “Mister Wojtowicz, it’s me, Wasyl Krawiec from Książpol, please tell my wife!” Another one recognized the girl and shouted at her: “Kasia, Kasia, it’s me, a cadet, I was billeted at your home.” She recognized him – indeed, it was a Polish cadet who once had been billeted at their home. K. Lendziak remembers those two prisoners quite well. As far as the others were concerned, she remembered their legs – lacerated and bleeding. Many of them walked down this gravel road barefoot. Some had only foot wrappings on their feet, which – undone – were trailing on the ground behind them.²¹

The trucks and column of prisoners – those are the things that people remember. We can only speculate about what happened later in the saltern. “Salina” yielded its painful secret when the Germans arrived in the town together with their allies – the Slovaks. Local inhabitants went to the saltworks together with the new invaders. They saw a terrible scene there. Today it is hard to give precise facts and numbers. Seeing those mutilated corpses, witnesses could only speculate about how they had been murdered. Some of them had been stabbed to death with bayonets. Smashed skulls indicated that the victims had been hit on their heads with something heavy, probably a sledgehammer of some kind. In one of the testimonies one can read: “After the Germans had invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Soviets started taking people into the saltern. I don’t know whether they were alive or dead. Nor do I know exactly who was killed there or when it happened. I don’t know how many people were killed there. I don’t know how old they were or what professions they had. I don’t know their nation-

20 Ibid., pp. 41–42.

21 Ibid., p. 44.

alities, either."²² The Germans ordered exhumation. It was the beginning of another tragedy in that place.

"The exhumation began around the 10th of July 1941. The bodies were taken out of the mineshaft by young people of Jewish descent brought there from Dobromil. Each day they had to report to the 'new Roman Catholic presbytery', which became the headquarters of the German military police; a few citizens of Ukrainian descent joined them as well. Ukrainians with blue-yellow armbands escorted the Jews wearing armbands with a Star of David to the saltern." After the bodies had been taken out, they were examined by a doctor. Families trying to find their relatives were allowed to see the bodies as well. Not only the Jews were forced to work on the exhumation (though they had to do the worst part of the work) but also local farmers who had horses and wagons. The participation was compulsory and the work was unpaid.²³

Another eyewitness has stated: "I saw the bodies being taken out of the mineshaft. The Jews were doing the work assisted by the Slovak soldiers that came with the Germans. The bodies were being pulled out with hooks, laid down on the horse-drawn wagons and carried to the grave dug up near the ventilation shaft. [...] Ten bodies had been taken out before my very eyes, before I walked away. People said that 290 bodies were taken out and put into the grave."²⁴

Another participant of the exhumation has given a similar report: The Germans "ordered the Jews to dig in this place. It turned out to be a mass grave." Local people witnessed the exhumation carried out by the Jews. They built a primitive platform, nailing together some wooden planks, and used it to carry the bodies taken out of the grave. They covered the bodies with chlorinated lime but there was an awful stench in the air anyway. When the disinterment of the bodies from the mass grave was over, they set about taking the bodies out of the flooded mineshaft. "The first layers of bodies were being taken out easily, but those lying deeper were much harder to bring out, because they were covered with water or brine. The Jews got fire hooks similar to those used by firemen. Those bodies were already falling apart; they were being laid down on the platform and then

22 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Edward Sz., p. 309.

23 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Tadeusz P., with annexes, pp. 612–618.

24 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Bronisław P., pp. 192–193.

next to those taken out earlier. In the end they abandoned further attempts. Nothing more could be done with those hooks. The Jews were beaten during their work and sometimes thrown down the shaft.”²⁵

This is how the saltworks in Lacko near Dobromil first became a place of death for the “enemies of the people.” People driven there in trucks or brought by foot were killed by the “red” murderers. The new authorities – the German invaders – were not any better. Together with their Slovak allies and some local inhabitants, they turned the saltworks into a place of death for the Jews.

Despite an explicit ban, the Slovak soldiers murdered the Jews. One of the eyewitnesses (then a 11-year old girl) recalls such an event:

“I was born and lived at ‘Salina.’ [...] A post was established there, when they began to bring in bodies. They were brought in trucks coming from the direction of Przemyśl. Nobody knows from where exactly. There were transports of living people as well – a few trucks. These were officers’ families – women and children. Nobody knows who exactly they were. [...] The Soviets escaped from the Germans by night. The day after they had left, when people went to ‘Salina,’ they checked first whether the salt mine is being used. When those trucks were coming, people thought that they carried guns or ammunition. The first thing spotted at ‘Salina’ was a pile of empty suitcases. The Germans and Slovaks organized to disinter bodies – they forced the Jews to do the work for them. The bodies were put on a blanket. Then the Jews were carrying them over – one at the front and another at the back – to the garden (orchard), to the so-called upper grave. Among the working Jews there was one whose surname was Szpira (I knew him, because his father was a shopkeeper). Szpira was tired and asked them to let him go home. The Slovak (soldier) who was guarding him hit him several times with a rifle butt. During the beating, Szpira let go of the blanket. The dead body fell out to the ground. Szpira fell down as well. Everybody could hear the words: *Now go home*. Szpira was beaten up so badly that when he got up he fell down again and died. There was an awful stench in the air at Salina. We had hand-

25 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Władysława M., pp. 259–261.

kerchiefs at our noses sprinkled with perfume. [...] I was scared but I remember a lot, though I was only eleven then."²⁶

The Slovak archives contain memoirs of the military prosecutor from the times of World War II. Among other things they contain some remarks concerning the events in Lacko:

"In the town of Dobromil the inhabitants discovered bodies of men shot to death and buried in a saline pit. [...] A fanatical mob started a pogrom – there had been a long tradition of pogroms there. All male Jews were driven to the pit and ordered to take the bodies out of the brine; at the same time they were beaten on their heads with clubs, stoned or thrown into the grave. Then a small troop of Slovak soldiers stopped there. A sergeant shot to death some old Jew with his pistol."²⁷

During his trial, that sergeant, Michał Mano, did not demonstrate any sorrow over killing that Jew. He explained that he did it out of compassion: He could not stand the sight of an old man with broken arms and bleeding head any more. His shot was an act of mercy and pity, he explained. He could not stand the sight of agony of that old man any more. Even though the court accepted his explanations, Sergeant M. Mano was demoted to private and sentenced to 2.5 years in prison.²⁸

The Germans acted as passive bystanders. Were the Jews murdered only by the Germans and Slovaks? The Slovak sources suggest that local inhabitants took active part in the killing. Did the new invaders differentiate between Poles and Ukrainians? The answer to this question is given by M. Lacko: "They differentiated not between Ukrainians and Poles or between Roman Catholics and members of the Orthodox church, but only between 'local people' and the Jews."²⁹

Why did the local people act against the Jews? One can find the answer to this question in the paper of Ukrainian historian J. Hrycak. He sug-

26 Oral account by K. H., Dobromil, 10th July 2011.

27 Martin Lacko, *Armia słowacka we wschodniej Polsce w 1941 roku*, in: *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 1 (2003) 3, pp. 217–234, here: p. 228.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 230.

gests that the border area between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union was exposed to rapid “sovietization” and brutal terror. When the Soviets fled, the Jews remained; “many Ukrainians from Galicia regarded [Jews] as helpers and collaborators of NKVD.”³⁰ Prisons that were opened after the escape of the Soviets presented a terrible sight that aroused desire for revenge. With the consent of the Germans, the Jews were exploited to do the exhumations and burials. According to J. Hrycak “[...] violence and beatings accompanied the whole operation [...]” Drawing on the Ukrainian sources he points out that anti-Jewish riots occurred in 58 town and cities in Western Ukraine. The truth is painful but, as he insists, “there is too much evidence, too often repeated, one could not possibly ignore it.”³¹

Number of victims of the massacres in the Dobromil prison and in the Lacko-Salina saltworks

The prison in Dobromil was designed to hold 60-70 people. In their book *Zachodnioukraińska tragedia 1941* [*Tragedy of Western Ukraine 1941*] Oleh Romaniw and Inna Feduszczak say that in 1941 up to 1,000 people were detained there.³² When one looks at the building of the former prison it is hard to imagine the horrible conditions the prisoners had to endure (the front part of the building has two storeys). According to the Branch Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation in Rzeszów, about 250 people were brutally murdered in the prison between 23rd and 27th of June 1941.³³ According to Slovak sources, 800 people were murdered there.

The case of the saltworks in Lacko is similarly inconclusive. According to the German collaborationist press, 600 people were murdered there.³⁴

30 Jarosław Hrycak, *Zbyt wiele świadectw: Ukraińcy w akcjach antyżydowskich*, in: *Nowa Europa Wschodnia* 3–4 (2009), pp. 160–166, here: p. 161.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

32 Олег Романів (ed.), *Західноукраїнська трагедія 1941*, Львів – Нью Йорк 2002, pp. 58–59.

33 On the basis of: OKŚZ Rzeszów – Decision on dismissal of the case, pp. 824–829.

34 *Dobromil – widownią niesłychanych okropności*, [no author] “*Dziennik Radomski*” 1941/184, 10th–11th August, p. 2.

The Slovak sources give the number as 1,080³⁵ and Ukrainian sources say 3,600 were killed.³⁶ Polish sources estimate that there could have been up to 1,800 victims.

Whatever the case, several hundred innocent people were brutally murdered in Dobromil and Lacko.

Who were the victims of Dobromil – Salina?

One should differentiate between the following groups of victims:

1. victims of NKVD;
2. victims of Jewish descent;
3. murdered functionaries (collaborators) of NKVD.

The first group – victims of NKVD killed in Dobromil and in Lacko – is the largest. The numbers given above refer to these victims. As far as their executioners are concerned, they were NKVD functionaries – not only Soviets but also people of Jewish descent. The Jew whose surname was Grauer or Kramer was one of the main perpetrators.³⁷ (He is also mentioned in the studies of the Jewish Historical Institute.³⁸)

The second group is comprised of the Jews that the Germans and Slovaks forced to disinter the bodies. Many of these Jews were killed in the process. The question arises as to who murdered them. There is no doubt that they were victims of the German and Slovak soldiers. However – as was already stressed – one cannot ignore the Slovak sources that say that local inhabitants were murdering the Jews. Andrzej Żbikowski points out that the Germans met with a favorable response: "In the Lithuanian, Polish-Ukrainian or Rumanian lands local people actively cooperated with

35 Олексій Кафтан, Нотатки до питання про участь словацьких військ у боях проти Радянського Союзу, in: Michal Šmigel/Peter Mičko (eds.), Slovenská Republika 1939–1945 očami mladých historikov, part 4, Banská Bystrica: Katedra histórie FHV UMB; Ústav vedy a výskumu UMB 2005, p. 213.

36 Лось/Прокопечь/Лапичак, Саліна, pp. 37–38.

37 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Czesław P., pp. 38–40a.

38 <http://www.sztetl.org.pl/pl/article/dobromil/3,historia-miejscowosci/>

the Germans in anti-Jewish actions.”³⁹ One can justifiably ask whether this is not an overgeneralization, blaming all the inhabitants of those lands. After all, not all local Poles or Ukrainians were participating in murders of the Jews at the Lacko saltworks. And here is another strong statement of A. Żbikowski: “The Germans not only were murdering, but also created favorable conditions for murdering and persecuting the Jews by their Christian neighbors.”⁴⁰ There is no doubt that many (if not all) of those murderers were Christians (it is not important what their denomination was – after all, the Decalogue was the same for all of them!). There could be no possible religious justification for such conduct. “Thou shalt not kill” is a clear commandment! But did they kill as Christians? Did they kill in the name of God? We cannot answer this question and every such generalization may be unjust. Whatever the case, German propaganda did achieve its intended goal. One could sum it up as follows: “Since your relatives were killed, you are entitled to square up with the perpetrators. To be sure, there are no main perpetrators left, but their collaborators are still here.” So if one focuses solely on the question of who was murdering and gives no thought at all to the issue of who incited the murder, one will be squaring up with direct executors only, but not with the main perpetrators.

The third group were themselves executioners, executors of orders, killed by their superiors so as to cover up the traces. In Dobromil, a prison governor and NKVD secretaries became such victims. At the saltworks, NKVD commanders killed their rank and file subordinates, who earlier had themselves been brutally murdering people with sledgehammers or bayonets.⁴¹

“Periphery of remembrance”

To this day, none of the appropriate government institutions (neither Polish nor Ukrainian) has done anything to commemorate the victims of Dobro-

39 Andrzej Żbikowski, *U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na Kresach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej, wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1941*, Warszawa: ŻIH [The Jewish Historical Institute] 2006, p. 205.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

41 OKŚZ Rzeszów, Report of questioning of a witness – Czesław P.; J. Salak, *Katyń pod Dobromilem*, manuscript in possession of the author.

mil and Salina. There were various initiatives, but exclusively grass-roots ones. The local administration of the Stary Sambor District, Lvov province, Ukraine, has erected a commemorative monument. For more than 20 years, on the last Sunday in June, commemorations have been held, starting at the building of the former prison and ending at the monument at Salina.⁴²

For many years there were no official representatives of Poland at the celebrations. This is why Polish victims were either not mentioned or their numbers were significantly reduced. This distortion can also be found in the book by Maria Prokopec. In the first edition (1995) one can read that Salina is a place where innocent Ukrainians who rendered great service to the cause of independence were murdered.⁴³ The second edition (2011) mentions that "some" of the victims were Polish.⁴⁴

This situation has been exploited by the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists. According to the organizers of those annual celebrations, the victims of Dobromil and Salina were "nationally conscious Ukrainians" murdered by Muscovites. The concept of a "nationally conscious Ukrainian" is a Ukrainianism. In this context it means that those who died in Dobromil and Salina gave their lives for a free Ukraine. Were all the Ukrainians murdered there "nationally conscious Ukrainians"? As mentioned earlier, during the final days before the German-Soviet war one could be arrested for the slightest reason. No charges at all were put forward to many of the detained; their names were not recorded.⁴⁵ Anyone who appeared in the street at the wrong moment could be arrested.

As mentioned before, it is hard to estimate the number of victims; it is equally hard to tell their nationalities. Whatever the case, all the victims of the NKVD in Dobromil and Salina were citizens of the Republic of Poland.

As far as the Polish victims are concerned, a few years ago the situation began to change. The Poles murdered there are now mentioned during the commemorations. The Jewish victims are still marginalized.

42 Лось/Прокопець/Лапичак, Саліна, р. 118.

43 Ibid.

44 Марія Прокопець, Дзвін Саліни, Львів 2011.

45 Романів (ed.), Західноукраїнська трагедія 1941, pp. 51–52.

Anatolij Podolski, director of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, uses the phrase “periphery of remembrance.”⁴⁶ Drawing on the German historians Wilfried Jilge and Guido Knopp, he warns that pushing painful issues to the “periphery of remembrance” may lead to the situation that the future generations will not know who was rescued by the righteous.

Salina is an excellent example of how one group of the victims – the Jews – is pushed to the “periphery of remembrance.” A. Podolski, still referring to the above-mentioned German historians, adds that while we are not responsible for the past we are responsible for the future: in other words, for what we will do with our knowledge.

However, if there still is no readiness on the part of both Polish and Ukrainian authorities to investigate the events that took place in Dobromil-Salina, the history of those places will be incomplete and maybe even distorted.

Dobromil-Salina as a memorial

The story of Dobromil-Salina demonstrates how complicated history can be and how cautious one should be when interpreting events one has not witnessed.

Salina may become a place where no one will need to apologize to anyone else. Instead, it could be a place for reflection on the cruelty of war and on the loss of humanity.

Ukraine and Poland have managed to take care of numerous places that are the final resting places for victims of the totalitarian regimes. Dobromil and particularly Salina are difficult places. There is a need for courage on all sides, and if it turns out that we do not have enough courage, maybe someone will one day ask why we failed. And once again all of us – Poles, Ukrainians, Jews and others – will feel as though we were attacked. The next generation, uncovering the truth about those places, might even bear a grudge against us for failing to do something about it.

46 Anatolij Podolski, *Społeczeństwo ukraińskie a pamięć o Holokauście – próba analizy wybranych aspektów*, in: Emil Majuk (ed.), *Praca z “trudną pamięcią” w społecznościach lokalnych. Polsko – ukraińska wymiana doświadczeń. Materiały seminaryjne*, Lublin 2010, pp. 26–35, here: p. 29.

In Dobromil and Salina, Jews collaborated with the Soviets. Then "local inhabitants" acted against the Jews shoulder to shoulder with the Germans and Slovaks. However one should remember that not all Poles, Ukrainians or Jews acted this way. Generalizations are always wrong.

Due to the painful events of World War II, the nature reserve Salina – Lacko (Solanuwatka) became the burial ground Salina – Lacko. Elderly people often say: salt from Salina is bitter. The truth about the Dobromil – Lacko saltern is equally bitter.

This place, so close to the border of Poland, still remains barely known.

Alti Rodal

The Ukrainian Jewish Encounter's Position and Aims in Relation to Killing Sites on the Territory of Ukraine

UJE's mission and its interest in the issue of mass graves in Ukraine

The Ukrainian Jewish Encounter (UJE) is a privately organized initiative whose goal is to deepen the understanding of the breadth, complexity and diversity of Ukrainian-Jewish relations over the centuries, with a view to the future. The initiative was established in 2008 as a collaborative project that would create a framework, process and sequence of programs to enable the two formerly stateless peoples, sharing memory (from differing perspectives) and space (in the home territory and in lands of resettlement), to understand each other's historical experience and narratives, to treat embedded stereotypes and to more firmly secure a foundation for building modern identities and relations based on mutual empathy and respect.

UJE considers the identification, protection and respectful treatment of mass graves on the territory of Ukraine a moral and societal obligation in itself. It is also important as a way of demonstrating commitment to a future based on an honest, principled treatment of the past and respect for human dignity and justice. Upholding and evincing these values by practical cooperation in the sensitive and proper treatment of mass graves would advance mutual understanding and respect between Jews and non-Jewish Ukrainians.

Situation regarding mass graves in Ukraine

UJE's endeavors with respect to mass graves, are focused on the territory of today's Ukraine.

Neglect of mass graves from World War II, as well as from the 1930s, was the norm during the Soviet period; treatment of the neglected mass graves became possible only with the collapse of the Soviet order. The promise of conditions more conducive to dealing with mass graves came with Ukrainian independence and a number of legislative measures in the 1990s, which established mass grave sites as heritage sites protected by law. More than twenty years have passed, however, without much progress.

Since its inception six years ago, UJE has been in discussions on the issue, with the principal concerned actors in Ukraine. We have noted how their efforts have been hobbled by disorganization, a measure of competition amongst the actors, scarcity of resources and the low priority attached to the issue by the mainstream. A key source of the difficulties encountered in a number of cases is the fact that the administration of heritage sites is assigned to municipal authorities, who at times are strongly motivated to find ways around the protection of mass grave sites, for example, in order to accommodate developers' commercial interests in the land, or in response to local biases, which in some instances trump respect for the law. Take the case of Sambir, where, rather than helping with the protection and memorializing of mass grave sites, the heritage legislation is being used to justify both the crosses set up near the mass grave in the Jewish cemetery and the spending of public funds on a proposed further memorial in the cemetery devoted to alleged Ukrainian partisan deaths.

At the same time, we have observed the impact and potential of the growing awareness, over the last decade in particular, of the history of the Holocaust in Ukraine. There are earnest though still underfunded efforts to educate Ukrainian teachers regarding the Holocaust, including its manifestation on Ukrainian lands. There are significant research efforts and publications by scholars from North America, Ukraine and elsewhere on the horrors perpetrated in the territory of Ukraine in the 1930s and 1940s, whereas the focus of Holocaust research and teaching previously had been more on Poland. Of further importance in this respect is the work of Father Patrick Desbois and his team in identifying Killing Sites and collecting eyewitness testimonies in Ukraine, and an expanded focus on WWII events in Ukraine at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Institute for Advanced Research. UJE has been in a position to support these efforts.

Of potentially great importance is the emphasis on pluralism and interethnic cooperation given expression during the Maidan events, and

currently on the part of the post-Maidan government. Of course, Ukraine faces immediate and daunting challenges, not least from Russian confrontation, but there is nevertheless movement to a reorientation that includes readiness to confront the dark chapters in Ukrainian history. This includes paying due respect to and properly memorializing the hundreds of thousands of victims (Jewish, Christian and other), who lie in unmarked and unprotected mass graves across Ukraine.

Context for UJE's role

UJE's aim is to assist and build on the activities of organizations that have made the treatment of mass grave sites in Ukraine part of their mandate. In recent years, UJE was engaged in discussions of how efforts might be better coordinated and expanded. We appreciate the fact that IHRA is assuming a coordinating role, one which it is eminently well positioned to fulfill. We especially welcomed the IHRA conference in Krakow in January 2014 as an important step in bringing the various organizations together, and we strongly support the approach that is emerging. For its part, UJE would see its role in terms of "facilitative advocacy" work at the political level and with civil society organizations in Ukraine, to advance protection, consecration and memorialization of mass graves of victims of the Shoah, and also of Soviet-era atrocities, in the territory of Ukraine.

Immediate goals

UJE is preparing a package of proposals for the new Ukrainian leadership. These will *inter alia* bear on (and support) Ukrainian adherence to IHRA, and IHRA's objectives in relation to mass graves, as well as IHRA's broader mission of advancing Holocaust remembrance, education and memorialization.

With regard to mass grave sites, UJE will continue its consultations with organizations dealing with mass grave sites in Ukraine – including Josef Zissels' team, which is working with *Lo Tishkach* to identify and document Killing Sites in Ukraine; Meylakh Sheykhet's efforts to protect mass gravesites by legal means in specific court challenges; the American Jewish Committee in relation to its five pilot projects in Ukraine; Patrick Desbois

of Yahad in Unum and his research team; and Yad Vashem in relation to its project “Untold Stories: Killing Sites Online Electronic Database.” The purpose of these consultations is to enable us to more clearly identify obstacles encountered over the past two decades with respect to

- identification and documentation of sites;
- protection and preservation of sites; and
- memorialization of the victims, which includes designing, setting up and promoting respect for memorials at mass gravesites.

Through these consultations, we would also seek to identify and document approaches that have proven productive with respect to each of these aspects.

UJE would aim to assist in the development of proposals for properly marking, consecrating and protecting mass graves in Ukraine – in collaboration with IHRA’s Multi-Year Work Plan Steering Committee on Killing Sites in Eastern Europe, as well as with the various organizations whose mandates focuses on mass grave sites in Ukraine.

Such proposals would help UJE in its discussions with senior Ukrainian authorities and other relevant actors.

Expected outcomes of UJE’s facilitation and advocacy role

The central government would accord higher policy priority to the issue of mass graves, and re-affirm and enforce existing laws to protect mass gravesites as heritage sites.

The central government would take specific measures to bring regional and local authorities into compliance, in particular with respect to the commercial development and vandalism of mass gravesites.

Ukraine’s religious leaders, through the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO), would reaffirm and strengthen their endorsement of and support for stronger measures regarding the mass gravesites, and articulate specific means to make their influence felt.

Educators will undertake to sensitize youth to understand and respect mass gravesites and their memorials.

The media in Ukraine and beyond would be more profoundly sensitized to the issues and will more closely monitor developments at the

national, regional and local levels, in particular developments at specific sites where difficult problems have arisen (such as in Sambir).

Conclusion

UJE's work to foster a receptive political and societal climate in the Ukrainian arena for Ukraine's participation in IHRA and for coordinated, effective action in the treatment of mass graves in Ukraine is an important aspect of its core mission and activities, which aim to advance mutual comprehension and respect between Jews and non-Jewish Ukrainians today. Without greater mutual understanding, respect, support and cooperation, it will be more difficult to address the issue of mass gravesites in a sustained and enduring manner. Conversely, cooperative action to counter neglect and abuse of mass gravesites would have an important, positive impact on building greater mutual understanding and respect between Jews and non-Jewish Ukrainians.

Meylakh Sheykhet

The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (VAAD) of Ukraine

The conference organized by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance was historically valuable; its work will yield positive results for the protection of historical Killing Sites of the Holocaust. I am here to represent two organizations: VAAD of Ukraine and the American Union of Councils for the Jews in the Former Soviet Union.

The importance of preserving the Killing Sites of the Holocaust is one of the dominant factors in upholding the importance of human life. This must be considered as a strong message from Heaven, which we must follow in order to return stability to the world and to assure humanity as one of the main values to save the beautiful world created by Almighty, the priceless value of human life through proper commemoration. Those victims of the Holocaust resting in thousands of mass graves are still waiting for us to come and honor their lives. Few of them left anyone behind, after the Jewish communities were completely wiped out by the Nazis; tombstones from the Jewish cemeteries were used to pave roads. The Jewish cemeteries destroyed by the Nazis must be also respected and commemorated – just as the Killing Sites of the Holocaust. From these tens of thousands of mass graves and abandoned Jewish cemeteries our lost family members call us to come and commemorate them.

Commemoration is one of the fundamental means of reconciliation between those who were ruthlessly murdered and those who were tools of the totalitarian Nazi regime, used to kill innocent people – both Jews and non-Jews.

Without proper commemoration, reconciliation is challenging and hardly possible.

Commemoration of the Killing Sites of the Holocaust must be done in a scientific, sophisticated way, regulated and according to Jewish religious law, as well as international and Ukrainian law.

The scientific sophisticated approach must be prepared through determination of the exact location and boundaries of the gravesites, established protected zones. The exact boundaries could be established based on the archival documents, testimonies and instrumental studies using the classic methodology and the newest hi-tech technologies.

Since 1998 we have studied the Rule of Law in Ukraine and of the Former Soviet Union for burial sites dating back to 1921, in order to find legal ways to protect Jewish grave sites that were abandoned and severely vandalized by the Nazis during World War II and then by the local soviet municipalities and real estate developers.

After World War II the Soviet totalitarian system produced new topographic documentation different from what existed till 1930, when they removed from the city documentation any references to Jewish historical-cultural heritage, such as Jewish cemeteries, gravesites and Jewish community property. Based on their post-Soviet disrespect and government antisemitism, still existed among the former communist authorities after the fall of the Soviet Union, the newly established post-Soviet Ukrainian governmental offices rejected the Jewish claims until we took the initiative to study the Rule of Law ourselves. Another reason enabled such mistreatment of Killing Sites used during the Holocaust: The Jewish mass graves since World War II were never properly studied, treated, protected and commemorated because of the complete absence of any documentation when the Nazis withdrew. Such documentation is still difficult to get from the Deutsche Bundesarchiv.

All commemoration work was based on testimonies only, which gave us no chance to establish proper locations, boundaries and numbers of mass graves. In this way all Jewish claims were not supported by proper documentation, not marked, disregarded by local municipalities; Jewish gravesites were built over, vandalized or improperly used and neglected.

The law of self-governing of Ukraine obliges the local municipalities to stop work immediately after human remains have been identified and proper documentation has been provided to the Council of Deputies. Many times we heard Jews crying while watching Jewish remains thrown out of the pits of the Holocaust Killing Sites and thrown out of abandoned Jewish cemeteries. The Killing Sites have not received a proper commemoration and have remained neglected until the state-required documentation was submitted.

In 2001 Natalya Zarudna – the Vice Deputy to the Foreign Office Minister of Ukraine – reported to President George W. Bush’s envoy Arye Storch that Ukrainian Rule of Law as inherited from the FSU, did not provide for protecting Jewish grave sites. I replied to her: We studied the Rule of Law of Ukraine and we disagree with you – it has been improved by the Ukrainian Parliament in order to treat Jewish burial sites with respect for religious and international standards.

We studied this tragic situation time and again, along with the ways in which Jewish burial sites must be protected. I learned that the government of Ukraine (even the government of the FSU) was obliged to protect every gravesite. Unfortunately, until I reported this to the US State Department’s Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad nobody had any understanding of how to combat the day-by-day vandalism of Jewish graves in Ukraine. I participated in four meetings of the bilateral US-Ukraine Commission for the preservation of historical cultural heritage in both countries and the meetings were stopped after misleading statements uncovered by Ukrainian authorities. Based on our studies of the Ukrainian Rule of Law and international agreements Ukraine signed, we have sent letters to the Ukrainian authorities. A special Ukrainian governmental agency was established in 2004, ten years after the US-Ukraine Agreement was signed in 1994 with the US Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage abroad. Before 2004 the Ukrainian Government had no person to fulfill the governmental obligations for protecting every gravesite, including the Killing Sites of the Holocaust. This situation proved that Soviet-sponsored antisemitism continued in post-Soviet Ukraine. We could proudly say that our demands pushed the Ukrainian Government to honor its obligation and establish a special agency of the State National Cultural Heritage.

In continuation of our efforts we developed a sophisticated program, which included hi-tech technology for identifying the exact location of Jewish cemeteries and Killing Sites of the Holocaust, and set up a base for the reconstitution of Jewish gravesites according to the Ukrainian Rule of Law.

VAAD of Ukraine and the UCSJ, when they participated in the 2009 Conference on Jewish Assets after the Holocaust, proposed considering the gravesites as Jewish assets after the Holocaust. Our proposal was included in the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues (Prague 2009), which “encourage[s] states and the international commu-

nity to establish and support research and educational programs about ... the preservation of memorials in former concentration camps, cemeteries and mass graves, as well as of other sites of memory". Ukraine still has not signed the declaration.

Absence of proper preservation of the Killing Sites of the Holocaust has led to vandalism of sites that were unknown or those whose boundaries were improperly marked, where no documentation has ever been provided and efforts to protect the sites have been inadequate. Several new development projects had to be stopped or paused due to the fact that human remains were found during construction work. This still brings bitterness and sorrow to the families of those resting in these pits. From the religious and humanitarian viewpoint, the victims are also still facing humiliation.

The absence of documentation for the mass graves and destroyed Jewish cemeteries causes conflicts, violence and misunderstandings that, sometimes become antisemitic stereotypes related to alleged business interests, provocations and finally marginalization of the education and behavior of local people, and it destroys the understanding of the importance and value of human life and common memory.

The purpose of our organization is to ensure the preservation of Ukrainian Jewish cultural heritage across the country, and particularly the Killing Sites of the Holocaust as part of the historic cultural heritage of Ukraine – a task which had been prescribed in the national legislation of Ukraine and its international commitments, including the 1994 Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Ukraine on the Protection and Preservation of the Cultural Heritage destroyed by the totalitarian regimes.

Based on the collected experience we have developed a program of localizing, surveying and preserving the Killing Sites of the Holocaust, Jewish burial sites, Jewish cemeteries in the territory of the Former Soviet Union and other countries affected by the hostilities of World War II:

1. Gathering information on the approximate location of mass graves from different sources including eyewitness testimonies.
2. Searching for cartographic and other documents of World War II for these places.
3. Developing the state approved documentation, consisting of paper work surveying location plans with exact marked borders of the mass

graves; burial sites with the purpose of including them on the list of the National of Ukrainian Register of Historical Cultural Heritage.

4. Approval of surveying documents by the Board of Rabbis.
5. Submission of approved surveying documents to the local municipalities and central government offices.
6. Placement of information into the respective website.

Ukraine faces many problems in the preservation and protection of Killing Sites for the following reasons:

- a. The Killing Sites have not been documented to meet the requirements of the Ukrainian legislation. Only proper legally approved documentation could support our claims for the commemoration and protection of Killing Sites.
- b. The Rule of Law of Ukraine states clearly that the Ukrainian Central Government, governmental agencies and municipalities are obliged to respect the Killing Sites of the Holocaust but never implemented their obligations due to the following obstacles: absence of governmental research funds, absence of archival documents, absence of inner cooperation between the governmental agencies of Ukraine, forcible privatization of the land without any pre-studies as the Rule of Law required, and corruption.
- c. The current Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, with its Department of National Cultural Heritage and Cultural Treasures, was very co-operative, including Killing Sites into the National Register of Governmental Protected Heritage, as presented by our organization: “Citadel – Concentration Camp Shtalag-328” of Lviv and the cemeteries bordering the “Babi Yar Ravine”. Ukrainian historian Vitally Nachmanovich has also prepared documentation for our organization.

We were able to present the testimonies, documents and supply the Scientific Board of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine with documentation of surveyor studies, topographic maps, archival documents and the plan of boundaries.

In most cases we were rejected by the regional departments of cultural heritage preservation and local municipalities due to the complexities with sites that were for sale or already have been sold to contractors for construction and other development.

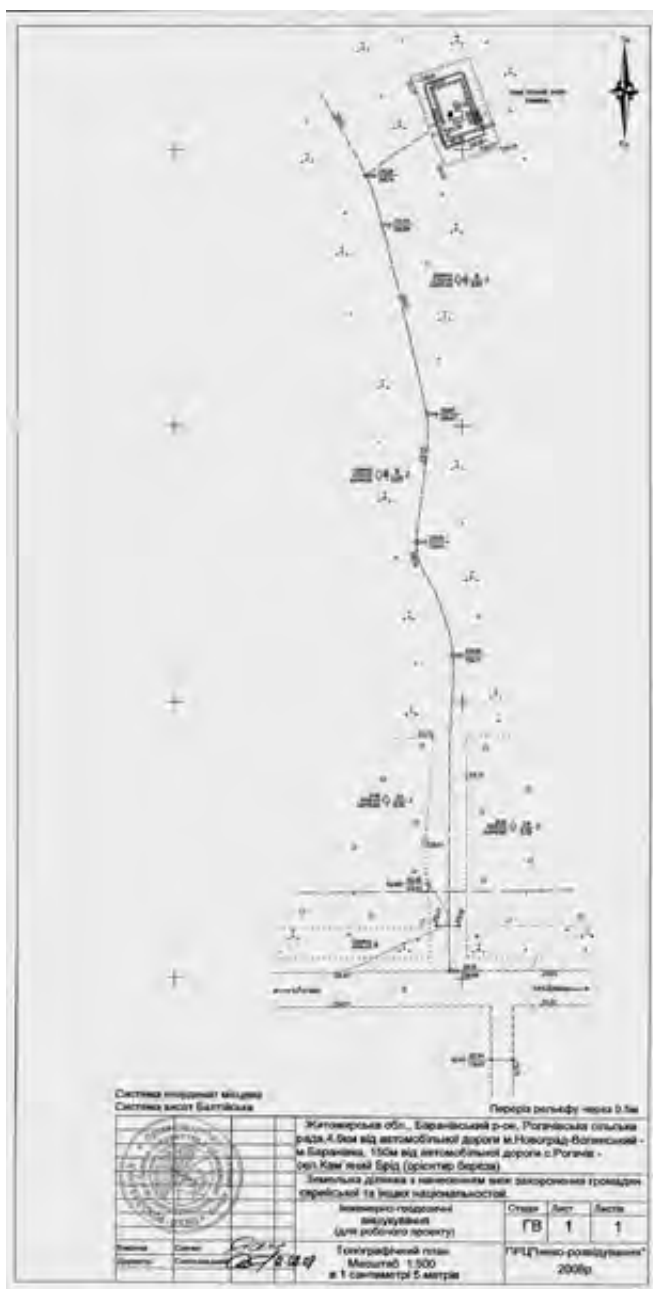
Kamiyanka-Buzka –
Zabuzhia – aerial photo
of two Killing Sites of the
Holocaust.

*Courtesy of UCSJ – Union
of Councils for Jews in the
Former Soviet Union*



Iv-Frankivsk mass grave at Belvederska Street.

Courtesy of UCSJ – Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union



Plan of the area and the mass grave near Kamyany Brid, Zhitomir Region.
 Courtesy of UCSJ – Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union



Interview with Adolf Wislowski at the site of Lysynychy Lviv where more than 60 mass graves were allocated.

Courtesy of UCSJ – Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union

More than 25 years of experience and participation in meetings of the bilateral Intergovernmental US-Ukraine Commission for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage have shown us that there remains a tendency in Ukraine – at the local levels of government – to turn a blind eye to the problem of preserving Jewish cultural heritage.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, which is a government body entrusted with powers and obligations to monitor compliance with the aforementioned international agreements, has not granted proper review to any of our requests concerning the systematic destruction of Jewish grave sites. Serving as one of the most important governing arms of the executive branch of government, the ministry has not reacted to a proposal to organize a roundtable discussion together with the Ministry of Justice, Supreme Administrative Economic, Supreme Courts, the Ministry of Culture, State Agency of Land Resources, Ministries of Regional Development and Construction, Communal Property, land authorities and other central governmental authorities whose participation would be critical to a comprehensive interaction to ensure compliance with the Rule of Law regard-

ing the preservation historical and cultural heritage of Ukraine, to which the Killing Sites of the Holocaust belong.

The municipalities aided by the judicial and court system of Ukraine are especially destructive in this regard. They violate the norms of the Property Law, and undo all our hard work for the preservation of the Killing Sites. The Ukrainian people overall insist on proper positive responses as required from the municipalities and regional governments to respect the Jewish claims for full protection the Killing Sites of the Holocaust and Jewish cemeteries, where the proper documentation have been submitted. The ignorance of the number of cases leads to the negative attitude toward the preservation of historical and cultural heritage of Ukraine, prompted by commercial antisemitic interests.

Jewish cemeteries and mass graves are being privatized and built upon day-by-day, leading to their brutal destruction. Here are some examples: the Old Jewish cemetery in Lviv, occupied by the Krakivsky Market (Krakivsky Rynok) and the Yanivsky Cemetery in Lviv, where Jewish Sages of many generations are resting; a gas station on the Jewish burials in Kolo-myja; disruption of the Jewish quarter of Lviv listed as the UNESCO World Heritage Site; construction of a hotel and commercial buildings on mass graves at the concentration camp known as Citadel; construction of commercial buildings in Ternopil; devastation of Jewish burial sites in Chort-kiv; construction of two new residential buildings atop the Jewish cemetery in Volodymyr-Volynsk; etc. – the list of brutalized Jewish sites is virtually endless. Also there is no governmental program for the preservation of the cultural heritage generally and the Jewish heritage particularly.

The Killing Sites in Ukraine have been vandalized by the so-called black archaeologists, whose illegal businesses were and still are looking for jewelry and gold teeth, ammunition and other historical objects from World War II.

We filed more than 40 court cases against the governmental offices and municipalities to stop the destruction of Jewish gravesites; we won some of them but the rulings were never enforced by the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice. We have a lot of experience to support our claims following the Rule of Law, the Civil, Administration and Economic Codes and international agreements. We filed claims with the European Court of Human Rights many years ago; our claims have been accepted but never processed.

Yesterday I received a message from our lawyers that our 10-year-old case to protect the Jewish cemetery in Berdichiv, which was built over by

garages and where the tombstones were used for the foundations and markets atop the graves has been denied. You may ask me why it took so long to process the case. The answer is simple: The judges could not find an easy way to legally reject our claims, which had been proved by sophisticated documentation and expert testimony. So the judges footballed the case from one court to another, using any possible method, including illegal ones, to discount our claims and favor business interests, presumably bribed by the businesses located atop the Jewish graves. None of the judges was ever fired for acting callously and obviously against the Rule of Law of Ukraine. This will be another case for us to file with the EU Court on Human Rights. I would propose IHRA to fully support our quest to have the EU Court on Human Rights process our cases quickly, as the time is of the essence. The European Assembly in 2012 accepted a special resolution, which called on member states to protect Jewish gravesites.

The most important requirement for the legal preservation of the Killing Sites of the Holocaust, according to the Rule of Law of Ukraine, is the provision of sophisticated studies and proof of boundaries, and development of city/town/village documentation by licensed surveyors and architects, approved by the local municipal Council of Deputies. The testimonies of local witnesses are not respected as legal evidence by the Rule of Law of Ukraine but may be included in the documentation, in order to determine locations of Killing Sites. The exact location and number of mass graves could be detected using World War II documents, mainly aerial photos, which also are rarely found and of a quality that is seldom enough to reveal the Killing Sites. Our organization developed a special technology to detect the Killing Sites. An attempt to use geophysical penetration radar equipment yielded no positive results. We came to the conclusion that this method of detecting Killing Sites must be improved and then approved and permitted by the government of Ukraine. The obstacles to geophysical equipment are as follows:

- a. For every foot into the earth, the possible error of GPR comes to 1 inch (or 8 % error). So we would not be able to use the GPR to detect any human skeletons or separate bones.
- b. None of the professionals worldwide using forensic geophysical equipment guarantee the conformity of the results unless archaeological digging would be provided after their studies. The digging of human remains is strictly forbidden by the rabbis.



Studying the locations and sizes of the Killing Sites of Holocaust in Bryuchovychy near Lviv.
Courtesy of UCSJ – Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union

To resolve the obstacles and complexities our organization was looking for ways to avoid digging at the Killing Sites.

To do this we organized and provided fieldwork studies with Ukrainian and British scientists in 2012. In October of that year, the results of the fieldwork were reported and presented and were taken under proper consideration by the Board of Scientists of the Minister of Culture of Ukraine. We are going to continue and complete studies this summer with the same group of scientists according to the scientifically proven strategy; we believe this would support our decision to avoid archaeological digging on the Killing Sites.

We are co-operating with the governmental agencies of Ukraine for expertise.

As of today, our organization studied 187 grave sites including the Killing Sites of Rava Russka, Babi Yar, Citadel “Shtalag-328,” Pyatydni, Lysynychi, Bilogorshcha, Chortkiv and many, many others.

The work involved, and the exploration of many views, disagreements, intentions and ideas serve as education and set a path to move forward, to serve the Almighty and bring peace and justice. Memory is not static – it



Bryuchovychy – depressed soil of the Killing Site of Holocaust.

Courtesy of UCSJ – Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union



The Killing Site of Bylogorshcha near Lviv.

Courtesy of UCSJ – Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union

involves investigation and education. Only by using the process of commemoration as an instructional tool and emotional catalyst can commemoration be effective and fitting.

Proper preservation of the Killing Sites of the Holocaust would open new ways of reconciliation, would help stop hatred and would give hope for a peaceful future. Let me express my deep gratitude to the government of Germany, to the Chair Mario Silva and the leading IHRA crew for this conference. It will be a great contribution to a Holy cause; it will open new avenues to protecting the Killing Sites of the Holocaust. I would like to conclude my report with Nobel Laureate Eli Wiesel's words:

“To remember is to create links between past and present, between past and future . . .

Memory can also bring forth tensions and conflicts. But they can be transformed into culture, art, education, spiritual inquiry, the quest for truth, the quest for justice.”¹

1 Elie Wiesel, Report to the Congress and the President, Washington: U. S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad 2004.

Agnieszka Nieradko

Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland

The Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries (later RCC) in Poland has been dealing with the issue of forgotten Jewish war graves for nearly ten years. So far, in cooperation with the Lasting Memory Foundation, we have located and commemorated around 25 such graves. In 2012 we decided to intensify our work and efforts in this field as the last eyewitnesses of the Final Solution pass away and the next 5–7 years will be the last opportunity to reach those who lived through the times of the annihilation of pre-war Polish Jewry. Below I would like to give an overview of the methodology we use in our work as well as some of its first outcomes.

I would like to start with presenting the prime framework of reference within which the Rabbinical Commission operates, namely Halacha – Jewish religious law. It places specific obligations and restrictions on us. Moreover it defines our main priorities. First of all, we try to reach those who know at least the approximate location of a grave, since our task is to delineate the borders of the gravesite as precisely as possible. We are motivated by the laws of Halacha, according to which the remains of the deceased are bound intrinsically with their soul. Therefore disturbance of the bones means the disturbance of the soul. For that same reason, during our fieldwork research locating Jewish burials, we are obliged to use only non-invasive methods and devices, such as ground penetrating radar (GPR), metal detectors and aerial pictures. GPR detects disturbances in the ground, determining the depth at which they are located and their size. It does not however reveal the exact nature of the disturbance. The metal detector is an auxiliary tool and gives reliable results only under specific conditions. If the case involves a murder by shooting, the detector will not be of help since metal shells usually fall to the bottom of a grave, out of the detector's range. Since spring 2014, RCC has been cooperating with the department of Geodesy and Cartography at Warsaw University of Technology in the area of research and analysis of wartime German aerial photographs.

Thanks to this cooperation, the RCC has gained access to American and British archives where aerial photos made by the German pilots during the World War II are stored. Apparently it is a very effective method for locating burial sites. The success depends on three factors: the quality of an image, the size of the grave and the local geography. Thanks to the expertise of the professionals from the university, aerial geography has become a reliable source of information. Nonetheless, all those sophisticated methods would be of no merit had we not first heard a testimony of an eyewitness who directs us to the area for us to investigate. Once again it is worth underlining the importance that the “the human factor” plays in our work, confirming our initial thesis that local communities have kept the memory alive for seventy years about the fate of their Jewish neighbors and that they should be the starting point for our work.

At this point it is important to present the dynamics of our contacts with local communities. Our investigations are a response to the signals coming from the locals. Every month the RCC receives about four to five phone calls/emails/letters about forgotten Jewish graves. Those who contact our office are in most cases either eyewitnesses of an execution, their relatives, or local historians. Right now RCC is investigating around fifty Killing Sites; the starting point of the investigations was in all cases a request from an individual in the local community who came to confront the problem. The emotional approach to this issue in the local community varies from indifference to empathy, but seldom hostility. Nevertheless from our experience we can see that our arrival rarely brings new information. People living in the area are usually well informed of the location of the graves and who is buried in them. Therefore it would be more accurate to say that we are not dealing with forgotten, but rather abandoned Jewish war graves. The people who get in touch with us are those who do not accept this state of affairs.

Alongside the field research, the RCC carries out archival queries at the Polish State Archives, the Institute of National Remembrance, the records of the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute and Yad Vashem. In these records we seek confirmation of testimonies collected during the fieldwork but we also try to get a wider perspective on the Holocaust that took place in the investigated towns. Both the archives and local communities are sources of information about the identity of the victims. When researching the size and location of a grave we never forget about the victims. The RCC’s priority is restoring the humanity of the victims of the Holocaust. Therefore we

try to find out as much detail as possible: name, age, profession, place of origin. The intention of the RCC is to gather and include all this information for commemorative initiatives, such as installing a commemorative stone or a plaque by the grave.

All collected testimonies are recorded and – together with other data such as GPS coordinates of the graves, description of the executions, personal details of the victims, contemporary photographs from site locations of graves – will soon be made available on a specially designed website prepared by our team.



Chroberz Kielce area, central Poland, where we are speaking to a man who as a 9 year old child witnessed an execution of 14 Jews. He is sitting on the left, I'm in stripes and my colleague Aleksander Schwarz, a member of the Rabbinical Commission, with whom we work on IHRA project, is in dark shirt.

© Kamila Józefowicz



Krzywca, the area of Przemyśl, where we are making a Gpr research on the Jewish cemetery where according to a witness (a lady standing on the left) five Jews were shot and buried including a 5 year old girl Rywka.

© Kamila Józefowicz



Świeciechów area of Pionatowa, where Aleksander and myself are speaking to an eyewitness who remembers the last days of her Jewish neighbors. We are in the forest where this Jewish family was buried.

© Kamila Józefowicz

Adam Bartosz

Ways of Commemorating Roma Extermination Sites in Poland

Most Killing Sites and all memorial sites of the Roma exterminated by the Germans in Poland are located in the area occupied by the Nazis at the time, called the General Government. After invading Poland in 1939, the Germans relocated a considerable part of the Roma and Sinti population from Germany to this area. This made it easier for the Nazis to eradicate these people in the newly established death camps and at execution sites.

Only in the Southeastern part of Poland have more than 100 execution sites been identified based on local documentation and witness reports. Compared to the execution sites of Jews and Poles, just a fraction of those places has been commemorated in any way.

The most important site of such an atrocity is undoubtedly the German death camp complex of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Gypsies (Roma and Sinti) were imprisoned in a subcamp called *Familienzigeunerlager* set up in the spring of 1943 in Birkenau. Of more than 21,000 people sent to the camp, the majority never left alive. The last group of about 3,000 Roma was gassed to death by the Germans on the night of August 2, 1944.

In Auschwitz-Birkenau, Roma and Sinti martyrdom was commemorated in a variety of ways, one of which being the establishment of a central International Monument of Martyrdom in Birkenau in 1967. Among the 21 plaques one was written in the Romani language.

In 1973 at the *Zigeunerlager* site, German Sinti erected a monument which now has become the central site for commemorative gatherings. Also, as part of the German Sinti initiative, an exhibition devoted to the Sinti and Roma exterminated in the camp was set up in 2001. In 2010 a plaque commemorating the last 3,000 Roma exterminated in a gas chamber was placed next to the ruins of crematorium number 5.

Since August 2, 1994, when a ceremony was organized at the monument at the former *Zigeunerlager*, the date has been promoted as the International Roma Genocide Remembrance Day. The date was legally sanctioned



Auschwitz-Birkenau, Remembrance day for the victims of the genocide of the Roma, 2013. *Photo: Adam Bartosz*

by the Polish parliament in a declaration of July 29, 2011 and established as the official commemorative day under state patronage.

The Regional Museum in Tarnów plays a significant part in commemorating the Roma genocide. Since 1979, any obtainable artefacts and documents related to Roma culture and history have been gathered. This gave rise to a rich collection of items devoted to the topic. In 1990 the Ethnographic Museum (a division of the Regional Museum) opened the first ever permanent exhibition dedicated to *Gypsies/Roma. History and Culture*. Part of the exhibition is devoted to the Roma genocide. Apart from a variety of educational projects and publications the museum has been running an inventory of and maintaining sites commemorating the extermination of Roma across Poland.

One such project is the annual International Roma Caravan Memorial, held since 1996. This is a reenactment of a traditional Roma caravan camp, with exhibits, and both Roma and non-Roma participants. Actually it is a form of pilgrimage visiting sites around Tarnow related to the mass extermination. It is important to note that all of those places had been looked



Auschwitz-Birkenau, Remembrance day for the victims of the genocide of the Roma, manifestation of young Roma, 2013. *Photo: Adam Bartosz*

after and commemorated by local communities even before the project started.

One of the more significant spots visited during the pilgrimage is the village of Szczurowa, where in July 1943 Germans killed nearly every Roma from the neighboring camp. The tragedy was perpetrated in plain sight of local villagers, who had lived in close proximity with the Roma. Some had even married and started families together with Roma. The local community erected a monument on the Roma mass grave in 1966 to commemorate the relationship. I would like to stress the fact that it was the first such monument in the world.

One of the newest memorials at a local extermination site is the one dedicated in 2012, at the mass shooting site of 29 nomadic Roma from the Polska Roma group. The creator of the wooden structure is a Roma artist named Małgorzata Mirga-Tas. Apart from the Caravan Memorial participants, members of the government were present during the unveiling of the monument. Further actions commemorating the extermination sites are planned in the near future.



Provisory commemorated site of Roma Genocide, Bielcza, region Małopolska, 2010.

Photo: Natalia Gancarz

The Caravan Memorial fills in a significant gap in education about the genocide of both Roma and the majority population. Although the extermination of Jewish and Christian Poles is a topic at schools and educational institutions, knowledge about the genocide of Roma is not prevalent and only available to those who seek it.

Roma themselves have no means to learn about their past via the educational system and base their knowledge on accounts exchanged within family circles. The Caravan Memorial also plays an integrational role in that different Roma groups take part in commemorations on a regular basis, including those normally diffident towards each other. The reenactment element (caravans, travel, camps, bonfires, sleeping in tents, etc.) is quite valuable to the more nomadic groups. Their past, remembered in this form, helps maintain their ethnic identity. Notwithstanding, the more traditional groups also find the Caravan Memorial and its travel-oriented character as a significant component of their own culture.



Monument of Roma victims, Opening ceremony. Borzęcin Dolny, małopolska region, autor- Roma artist Małgorzata Mirga, 2012.

Photo: Natalia Gancarz



Opening ceremony. Monument of Roma victims. Ułęż, Lublin region, Poland, 2009.

Photo: Natalia Gancarz

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Andrew Baker

Protecting the Mass Graves of Holocaust Victims in the Construction of the Bełżec Memorial

The design of the Bełżec Memorial began with a concern for the mass graves on the site and the need to provide protection for them. For decades people had been free to walk about the area of the death camp. At its worst there were scavengers – humans and animals – who dug into the shallow graves. Even visitors who wished to tread carefully could not know when they were walking above the graves of the victims. The new memorial would not permit this to happen, as virtually the entire area of the former camp and all of the mass graves would be covered with the large and uneven boulders known as industrial slag. Visitors would be confined to the perimeter path and to the one means of entering the site itself – the distinctive fissure providing a cobblestone walkway that crosses the memorial from its entrance to the granite memorial wall on the opposite side. Careful archaeological investigations had determined that this path would not disturb any of the mass graves. In fact, this walkway essentially followed the same path that Bełżec's victims were forced to take, as they were herded from undressing rooms up the incline to the gas chambers.

Before any work began the Polish Council and the American Jewish Committee concluded an unprecedented agreement that would provide for rabbinic oversight throughout the entire construction period. Rabbi Michael Schudrich of Warsaw, the current Chief Rabbi of Poland, was asked to serve in this capacity. He and his representatives were given full authority to monitor the site and to stop construction at any time should they fear that Jewish law might be violated. In turn, Rabbi Schudrich consulted with Rabbi Elyakim Schlesinger, chairman of the authoritative Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe, who reviewed the initial design of the memorial and gave it his blessing. Of paramount concern to the rabbis was that the thirty-three mass graves on the site should not be disturbed. Additionally, as the surface soil could contain fragments of

human remains due to wind, rain and erosion over the years, no soil would be removed from within the site.

Special procedures were adopted by the construction company in consultation with the rabbis. At the outset, the mass graves themselves were marked and roped off, so that workers would know to avoid them. Before trucks and other equipment were driven onto the site, sand was brought in and spread along the paths they would take. In this way, even the treads of the truck could not inadvertently take away soil from the site itself. When the specialized equipment necessary for making the concrete walls of the fissure posed a problem, the construction engineers and rabbis devised a novel solution: During one period of the work it would be necessary for this heavy equipment to be placed over one of the mass graves, with the danger that its weight could actually press into the grave itself. Prior to moving the equipment in place, plastic pipe was laid, traversing the area above the grave. This in turn was covered with sand and then with concrete slabs, which would absorb and disperse the weight of the equipment. As long as it was possible to look through the plastic pipe from one end to the other – which the rabbinic representatives frequently did – they could be assured that the weight of the equipment had no impact on the mass grave beneath it.

Sadly, it is a reality of all the Nazi death camps in Europe that fragments of human remains, most often small bits of charred bones, are still to be found on the surface of the ground. But, when the major construction work at Bełżec was nearing completion, an Israeli specialist in the area of soil conservation and management was invited to visit the site and offer advice on the best ways to permanently protect the mass graves. Based on his recommendations, over seventy-percent of the entire site, including all the areas of the mass graves was covered with a special, heavy-duty geotextile material. This material, which is more frequently used to build roads and airplane landing strips in wilderness areas, will insure that not even the smallest fragments have any possibility of coming to the surface. The geotextile layers have been covered with sand and drainage pipes to divert water away from the surface and, in turn, covered with the industrial slag. Thus, the Bełżec Memorial provides the most complete and comprehensive protection of victims' mass graves to be found anywhere in Europe.

Dariusz Pawłoś

Personal Losses and Victims of Repression under the German Occupation

The purpose of this presentation is to show you the possibilities of using the documentary program “Personal losses and victims of repression under the German occupation,” e.g. how does the project help us find Killing Sites, and secondly how do we cooperate with people or international organizations working in this field.

The Foundation for Polish-German Reconciliation was founded more than 20 years ago and its major field of work was and still is to help and care for survivors of Nazi persecution in Poland. But there are also other very important aspects of the foundation’s activity:

- education, information and research
- initiation of projects aimed at promoting reconciliation and understanding between peoples, especially between Poles and Germans. Here it is essential to initiate and support dialogue within society and work on international reconciliation and understanding.

The Foundation was established in 1991 and has collected documents from more than one million survivors of Nazi repression who applied for assistance.

The Foundation for Polish-German Reconciliation is thus very engaged in preserving the memory of the victims of the Second World War.

And this purpose is also served by the program “Personal losses and victims of repression under the German occupation.”

“Every victim has a name”

In everyday language, in discussions about memorials as well as in scientific projects the term “victims of World War II” appears very frequently.

On one hand, this sort of language reflects the incredible dimension of injustice to which human beings were subjected. On the other hand, specific information is often not available: It is thus difficult to know about individual fates.

However a little research reveals details about the fates of many: Information can be found in such places as municipal archives, insurance company archives, the databases of local and regional history societies and on memorials. They are widespread and unfortunately incomplete. Furthermore, they contain misspellings, so names may be difficult to identify.

The project “Personal losses and victims of repression under the German occupation” aims to build a virtual home for all available information about victims of the Nazis living in Poland at that time. This information will be collected, sorted and made accessible to the public. This can only be realised through cooperation between various institutions.

We want to consider all those who were Polish citizens before the war, no matter which religion they practiced or which mother tongue they spoke. This is especially important due to the indescribable suffering of the Polish Jews. The Jewish victims are by far the largest group among those murdered.

Considering the fact that later generations will learn the history of World War II without direct testimony, our project is based on a contemporary approach to remembrance that recognizes and appreciates human fate and dignity.

Who is organizing the project?

The project was initiated in 2006 under the patronage of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation (IPN).

Since 2009, the Foundation for Polish-German Reconciliation has been in charge of the realization of this project. At present the database provides information on more than 4,5 million people, including 960,000 from the archive of the Foundation for Polish-German Reconciliation.

What is the aim?

The project intends to create a name register of all those who suffered under the repressions of the Nazi regime from 1939 to 1945 – those who were driven out, imprisoned or murdered. We want to gather this information and make it accessible to a wide public. Up to now, this has been achieved by various individual, local and regional as well as historical and scientific projects. The consolidation of existing knowledge would provide future projects with an excellent basis for much more efficient research into Nazi crimes.

Which information are we seeking?

Apart from basic information, such as, name and surname, place and date of birth as well as place and date of death, we are also looking for the location, kind and duration of repression of Polish citizens, especially those who suffered in

- concentration camps
- ghettos
- so-called work education camps (*Arbeitserziehungslager*)
- prisons and penal camps (*Straflager*)
- prisoner of war camps
- forced labor conditions, and
- all those who died due to the war.

Challenges and problems

Many victims remain anonymous and through this project they may get their identity back. The data in this program will have to be supplemented with help from the last living witnesses and their families. Because of the age of the last survivors of Nazi crimes, there is no time to lose.

We have to face the fact that we never will know the exact number of Polish citizens who suffered and were murdered under the National Socialist regime.

Who can help?

Archives, monuments, memorials, cemetery administration, historical clubs, international search and rescue services as well as other research institutions and private initiatives can assist in this project.

Which additional benefit does the project offer to other institutions?

Institutions that want to support the project with their knowledge and documents can complete their own data and verify their information for correctness and inclusivity through comparison with our data.

Contributors are mentioned as sources in the database (www.straty.pl).

Astrid Sahn

Holocaust Memorials in the Belarusian Culture of Remembrance

The Issue of the Maly Trostenets Death Camp

Specific aspects of the Belarusian culture of remembrance during Soviet times

World War II holds a unique position in the collective memory of the Belarusian people. According to recent studies, Belarus lost one third of its population during the German occupation, while Soviet figures stated that 1.4 million civilians and 800,000 prisoners of war, i. e. one quarter of the Belarusian population, were killed. During the post-war period, the official Soviet policy of remembrance mainly focused on the partisan resistance movement's heroic fight against the German occupiers. However, in contrast to other Soviet republics, the commemoration of civilian victims was also an integral part of the official policy in the Belarusian Socialist Soviet Republic (BSSR).¹ This was most evidently demonstrated by the construction of the memorial in Khatyn, which was opened in 1969. In fact, the memorial united two memorials, because it is both a symbolic reconstruction of the village Khatyn, which was destroyed on 21 March 1943, and a cemetery dedicated to all the Belarusian villages that were destroyed. Additionally, visitors to the Khatyn memorial site will find the names of 66 concentration camps and other World War II Killing Sites located in Belarus – including the death camp Maly Trostenets (Maly Trasttsyanyets in Belarusian), which is, according to Soviet figures, the largest death camp on the territory of Belarus; more than 206,500 victims were murdered there.²

1 Astrid Sahn, *Im Banne des Krieges. Gedenkstätten und Erinnerungskultur in Belarus*, in: *Osteuropa* 58 (2008) 6, pp. 229–246.

2 For a detailed description of Trostenets see also the homepage of the Khatyn memorial complex at <http://khatyn.by/en/genocide/ccs/trostenec/>



The Khatyn memorial site.

Photo: Evgeni Pomytkin

The Belarusian capital, Minsk, also has one of the few Soviet-era monuments explicitly devoted to the Jewish victims of the Nazi terror, bearing an inscription in both Russian and in Yiddish. This monument – a small black obelisk – was established in 1946/47 by the surviving members of the Jewish community in the so-called Yama (“Pit”) where in March 1942 approximately 5,000 Jews from the Minsk Ghetto were killed by the German occupiers. It is quite astonishing that this monument was not destroyed by the Soviet authorities during the years that followed and actually did survive the Soviet regime. However, though the Holocaust reduced the number of Belarusian Jews by approximately 80 % or 800,000 persons, in general Holocaust remembrance was not part of official policy in the BSSR. As in other Soviet Republics, monuments usually referred to victims as “Soviet citizens” – even if it was well known that only Jews had been killed at certain sites.³

3 Marat Botvinnik, *Pamyatniki genocida evreev Belarusi*, Minsk: Belaruskaya navuka 2000.



The Obelisque in the Pit.

Photo: Evgeni Pomytkin

World War II and Holocaust remembrance in the independent Republic of Belarus

Beginning with Perestroika, both historical research and public commemoration opened up to fill in the blank spots of Soviet history. The gradual integration of the Holocaust into the official policy of remembrance during the 1990s was demonstrated by the appearance of information about the fate of Belarusian Jews in the permanent exhibition of the Museum of the Great Patriotic War. In May 1997, President Alexander Lukashenko visited the “Yama” for the first time. In 2000, Lukashenko visited the “Yama” for a second time, when he spoke at the opening ceremony for the new memorial established there.

State officials have participated regularly in public commemorations for the victims of the Minsk Ghetto since then.

Special attention was paid to the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of the Minsk Ghetto in October 2008, when a special state commission organized various state ceremonies – including the third visit of the Bela-



The “Yama” memorial and
The memorial for the murdered
Jews of Gorodeya (on the opposite
page).

Photos: Astrid Sahn

rusian president to the “Yama”.⁴ At the 70th anniversary, in October 2013, the Belarusian minister of foreign affairs, Uladsimir Makei, was the main speaker at the official ceremony at the “Yama”.⁵

However, in general the official historical discourse continues to be dominated by the traditional patterns of heroic resistance and glorious victory. Consequently, Jews cannot be treated as specific victims of the Nazi terror who had suffered in a different way than other Belarusian citizens. In the speech that President Lukashenko delivered at the “Yama” in 2008 he managed to integrate the fate of Belarusian Jews into the official discourse by claiming that Belarus was the only European country where Jews participated in the partisan movement and were active fighters against the German occupiers. In accordance with this logic, the Holocaust as such

- 4 Astrid Sahn, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg als Gründungsmythos. Wandel der Erinnerungskultur in Belarus*, in: *Osteuropa* 60 (May 2010) 5, pp. 43–54.
- 5 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus: *On the Participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Mr. Vladimir Makei in the Ceremony in Memory of the Minsk Ghetto Victims*, 21. 10. 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.by/en/press/news_mfa/dd6215dc213bb806.html/.



still remains a minor subject in the Belarusian educational system, and in history books one can find only a few lines about the Holocaust.

The Holocaust memorial sites created by Leonid Levin

The erection of monuments to Jewish victims of the Nazi terror played an important role in the gradual integration of the Holocaust into official public commemoration in post-Soviet Belarus. Their emergence was most actively promoted by Leonid Levin, who had become a famous architect as co-designer of the Khatyn memorial site and of many other World War II monuments in the 1960–1980s. After he was elected chairman of the Union of Belarusian Jewish Associations and Communities (UBJAC) in 1991, Leonid Levin began to concentrate on the creation of Holocaust memorial sites in Belarus.

The establishment of the new memorial at the “Yama” – in the opening ceremony of which, as mentioned above, President Lukashenko participated – was one of the main results of Levin’s activities. His other impor-

tant works include the memorial for the murdered Jews of Gorodeya (2004) and the memorial in the former ghetto of Slutsk (2007).⁶

The composition of Levin's monuments contrasts strongly with the monumental tradition of Soviet and post-Soviet Belarus. Levin's main aim is to give today's visitor, through his monuments, a sense of the terrible events that occurred at the site. And he wants the visitor to confront the individual fates of those murdered at these places by giving symbolic expressions of their probable last feelings. Thus, the center of the "Yama" monument is formed by a group of shadow-like people walking down into the pit. Additionally, Leonid Levin sometimes involved survivors and their descendants in the construction of his monuments. Thus, in 1969 survivors of the destroyed villages that had not been rebuilt after World War II were called upon to bring some soil from their previous home to the cemetery of the destroyed villages at the Khatyn memorial site. In 2004, the inhabitants of the town of Gorodeya were called upon to bring a stone for each of their 1,137 previous Jewish fellow citizens who had been killed by the German occupiers.

The "Laboratory of History" in the former Minsk Ghetto

Under the leadership of Leonid Levin, the UBJAC also established a close cooperation with German civil society initiatives in order to promote reconciliation between Belarusians and Germans through shared remembrance of the crimes committed by the German occupiers in Belarus during World War II. During the last 20 years, representatives of the International Center for Education and Exchange (IBB) not only participated in various commemoration events but also contributed to the increasing public acknowledgement that forced laborers, prisoners of war, prisoners of ghettos and concentrations camps should no longer be condemned wholesale as traitors to the fatherland and, therefore, have a right to be actively remembered.

So far, the most visible result of this enduring cooperation between Levin's union and IBB is the "Laboratory of History" (*Istoricheskaya mas-*

6 For a detailed description of the most important memorials created by Leonid Levin, see Astrid Sahn, *Architektur als Gratwanderung. Leonid Lewin – ein Werk als Brücke von Gedächtnis und Gegenwart*, Minsk: IBB 2008.

terskaya / Geschichtswerkstatt), which was opened in 2003 in one of the few preserved buildings of the former Minsk Ghetto.⁷ The laboratory combines various functions: On one hand it is a documentation and exhibition center and on the other it serves as a meeting place for survivors of the Nazi terror. The witnesses also play an important role in the educational work of the laboratory, by telling their life stories to pupils, students and other interested visitors from different countries. Today the “Laboratory of History” is a very lively place with about 10,000 visitors per year and a rich program of events, including conferences, seminars, workshops and club meetings.

The laboratory also pays special attention to the remembrance of the more than 20,000 Jewish citizens who were deported in 1941/42 from the then German Reich (i. e. today Austria, Germany and Czech Republic) to the Minsk Ghetto and the death camp Maly Trostenets. With the support of IBB and Levin's union, the municipalities of Berlin, Bremen, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Cologne/Bonn/Siegburg, Hamburg and Vienna erected monuments to their former Jewish fellow citizens during the 1990s and 2000s. These monuments are located in a former Jewish cemetery near the “Laboratory of History”. The Minsk city authorities actively supported their establishment. State representatives participated in the opening ceremonies of the monuments as well as in many conferences and workshops conducted by the laboratory.

The Maly Trostenets memorial site and the IBB initiative

From the very beginning the activities of IBB and the “Laboratory of History” included excursions to the Killing Sites in Maly Trostenets because that was where many prisoners of the Minsk Ghetto were killed. In 1942 the deportation trains from the then German Reich went directly to Maly Trostenets. Foreign visitors were usually quite shocked when they saw that the memorial site was increasingly overshadowed by the hills of a waste

7 Peter Junge-Wentrup, *The History Workshop in Minsk*, in: Matthias Klingenberg (ed.), *History and Identity. Insights into the dvv international History Network*, Bonn: dvv international 2010, pp. 127–134. Marina Bachilo, *Learn, Communicate, Remember ...*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 135–140. See also the website of the “Laboratory of History” at <http://gwminsk.com>.

disposal site, which was opened there after World War II. The obelisk and other small monuments erected since the 1960s at the site did not reflect the fact that Trostenets was the largest death camp established by the German occupiers on Belarusian territory. One reason for the lack of attention by authorities to the Trostenets Killing Site is probably the fact that it had already been used for Stalinist repressions before the German occupation. Consequently, the case of Trostenets was not included in materials of the Nuremberg trials in order to avoid raising international questions about the former use of the place.⁸

As a result of the more open historical discourse of the 1990s, which also raised more public attention to the issue of the Trostenets site, the position of the authorities began to change. In 2002 the Belarusian government decided to establish a memorial complex at the Trostenets site and in 2003 an international competition was held to determine the best future memorial. However, the competition did not lead to concrete results.⁹ This can be explained both by a lack of interest on the part of the responsible authorities and by difficulties in getting the necessary financing. Nevertheless, in the context of the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of the Minsk Ghetto, President Lukashenko repeated his intention to establish a memorial at Trostenets. And this time the Minsk city authorities obviously paid more attention to this issue. Nevertheless it took them another five years to determine a concrete plan for the composition of the memorial and to ensure its financing.

This plan, however, only included two Killing Sites in Trostenets: the camp near the former village of Maly Trostenets and the site in Shashkovka where the corpses of victims were burned. The forest of Blagovshchina – where according to Soviet sources about 150,000 people, including many deported Jews and prisoners of the Minsk Ghetto, were killed by firing squads or in gas vans – was only formally to be included within the memorial site, but was not part of the planned composition. In 2012, convinced that any memorial at Trostenets must include Blagovshchina, Leonid Levin – who already had submitted a project for Blagovshchina in the 2003 competition – and IBB started an initiative for the integration of

8 Johannes Voswinkel, *Die Stille nach den Schüssen*, in: *Die Zeit*, 14. 8. 2014.

9 *Belorusskiy partisan: Trostenets. Na meste chetvertogo po velichine lagerya smerti memorial tak i ne poyavilsya*, 21. 10. 2008, <http://www.belaruspartisan.org/bp-forse/?page=100&news=29822>.

the Blagovshchina Killing Site into the plans of the Minsk city authorities.¹⁰ The authorities met this initiative with general support and declared their readiness to integrate Levin's new project into its existing plans – provided that IBB could secure the necessary financing in Germany to cover the additional costs.

Thus in 2013 IBB launched a public awareness campaign on the Trostenets issue in Germany.¹¹ It was very important for the success of this campaign that the IBB initiative was supported in public by German Federal President Joachim Gauck. In 2013, German municipalities, organizations of the Catholic and Protestant churches, the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge) and other private foundations and active citizens collected about 500,000 euros for the establishment of the memorial in Blagovshchina. Additionally, in 2014 the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its readiness to offer financial support for the memorial. In response to these joint efforts the Belarusian authorities not only agreed to integrate the Blagovshchina site in its memorial plans but also to contribute its own funds to the realization of the project proposed by Leonid Levin.

The significance of the new combined memorial plans for the authorities was emphasized by the fact that on the 8th of June 2014 President Lukashenko himself took part in the ceremony of laying the memorial capsule at the future memorial site. Besides Lukashenko, the head of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) Ronald S. Lauder also delivered a speech at the ceremony, which was attended by hundreds of guests from Belarus, Austria and Germany as well as representatives of the diplomatic corps from other countries.¹² According to the current plans, the construction of the first part of the memorial at the Trostenets site should be completed by May

10 Peter Junge-Wentrup (ed.), *The Trostenets Extermination Site within European Commemoration. Materials from the Minsk International Conference, 21st–24th March 2013*, Dortmund: IBB 2014. Also available at: http://www.ibb-d.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf-2013-trostenez/trostenets_english.pdf.

11 For more detailed information about the campaign see <http://www.ibb-d.de/trostenetz.html?L=0>.

12 Belta: Lukashenko: Trostenets Memorial should become a site of pan-European significance, 8. 6. 2014, http://eng.belta.by/all_news/president/Lukashenko-Trostenets-Memorial-should-become-a-site-of-pan-European-significance_i_73561.html. EAJC President Julius Meinel Attends Ceremony at “Trostenets” Memorial, Congress News, 9. 6. 2014, <http://eajc.org/page84/news45308.html>.



The Blagovchshina site today.

Photo: Petra Kappe

2015. As the next step, the second part of the memorial, at the Blagovshchina site, should be realized. However, the necessary steps of preparation for the Blagovshchina site, i. e. the detailed planning and all formal permission procedures, began in 2014 with the active involvement of Galina Levina, the daughter of Leonid Levin, who died on 1 March 2014.¹³

Trostenets as a place of European remembrance

If the existing plans are successfully completed, Trostenets will be the first memorial to the victims of World War II in Belarus realised by joint efforts of Belarusians and Germans. Additionally, it is possible that Austrian initiatives will join the project. As a place where Jews from different Euro-

13 The new memorial plans were also presented in Belarus' largest newspaper, the "Sovetskaya Belorussiya," issued by the presidential administration. See Galina Ulitenok, Trostenets: zdes ubivali lyudey, in: Sovetskaya Belorussiya, 7. 6. 2014, <http://www.sb.by/obshchestvo/article/trostenets-zdes-ubivali-lyudey-165355.html>.



The combined memorial plans at Trostenets.

Photo: Astrid Sahn

pean countries as well as Belarusian Jews, members of the partisan resistance movement and other Belarusian citizens were murdered, the future Trostenets memorial site should become a genuine place of joint European remembrance. This intention is also shared by the Belarusian authorities, as President Lukashenko emphasized in his statement at the site in June 2014. But to accomplish this aim, the mere establishment of a memorial site will not suffice.

To this day, Belarusian memorial sites are merely composed of monumental elements and offer visitors only minimal information and possibilities for reflection. Rarely does one find documentation centers, seminar rooms or prayer rooms. So far the only exception is the memorial site in Khatyn, where a small information center was established during reconstruction of the memorial in 2004. In accordance with the dominant tradition, the original plans for the Trostenets memorial site, too, only included monumental elements. However, the Belarusian authorities already have expressed their general readiness to establish a documentation center at the memorial site. Additionally, the Trostenets initiative is supported by the heads of the Catholic and Orthodox churches in Belarus, which are

interested in establishing an interreligious prayer room at the site. It was very important that representatives of the churches and the authorities had the opportunity to visit several memorial sites to victims of the Nazi terror during a trip to Germany, organized by IBB in November 2013. The impressions gained at these places contribute to the development and increasing acceptance of new forms of commemoration in Belarus.

If the Trostenets Killing Sites are to become a place of common European commemoration, additional historic research will be required. So far, Western and Belarusian research differs in the assessment of the number of victims murdered in the Maly Trostenets death camp. While Belarusian historians continue to rely on the Soviet figures, Western researchers established the number of proven victims at about 60,000.¹⁴ The fact, that almost all names of Western European Jews deported to Minsk or Maly Trostenets are known, while few Belarusian victims are known by name, is another obstacle to the development of Trostenets as a place for shared European commemoration. It is, therefore, necessary for Western and Belarusian historians to conduct joint research projects.

The transmission of the history of the Holocaust and the Nazi regime in general to young people is another crucial precondition for the active development of a joint European culture of remembrance. It is therefore very important to preserve the memories of the survivors of the Nazi terror and to ensure their inclusion in pedagogical work with young people. For that reason IBB started to establish a digital archive that was presented to the public in March 2014 at the “Laboratory of History”.¹⁵ The archive includes the life stories both of Belarusian Jews persecuted by the German occupiers and of German Jews who were deported to Belarus. Additionally, new collections are to be added, e. g. life stories of the Righteous Among the Nations (rescuers of Jews formally recognized by Yad Vashem) and of forced laborers. So far, the archive is accessible in German and Russian, but hopefully an English version can be added in the future.

In order to encourage young people to get involved in Holocaust remembrance activities, IBB also plans to create a touring exhibition on Trostenets for Belarusian and German schools. However, young people also must have the opportunity to see the places where the Nazi crimes

14 Petra Rentrop, *Tatorte der “Endlösung”. Das Ghetto Minsk und die Vernichtungsstätte Maly Trostinez*, Berlin: Metropol 2011.

15 See <http://zeitzeugenarchiv.gwminsk.com/ru/about>.

were committed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the historical events and to draw conclusions for the future. Programs that would allow young people from Belarus to visit memorial sites in other European countries and young people from other European countries to visit memorial sites in Belarus could make a very important contribution to the development of a joint European culture of remembrance.

Michael Lazarus

The Belarus Memorials Project: The Simon Mark Lazarus Foundation, The Miles and Marilyn Kletter Family Foundation, The Geisler Family Foundation

By the time the Red Army had, in the summer of 1944, pushed the Germans out of Belarus 800,000 Jews had been murdered on its soil. Not all were Belarusian citizens, many having been transported from other conquered territories, mainly but not exclusively from Western Europe. Of the Belarusian Jewish population around 90 % had been killed, mainly in mass executions, by the occupation's end. There are in excess of 400 documented massacre sites across the country.

For reasons of, one suspects, Soviet era policy and, perhaps, indifference, almost none of these massacre sites had been marked as burial places and, accordingly, had not been afforded even a minimum degree of the reverence usually associated with such locations. In order to remedy this intolerable shortcoming, after having been apprised of the situation by an elderly member of the remnant Jewish community, my wife and I decided to set up a small charity devoted to rectifying what had for so long been unacceptably ignored. Our aim is to erect and dedicate, in accordance with Jewish custom, a memorial at every place where the murdered Jews are buried. With the support of the Belarusian authorities, initially tacit but now keener, and with the support of two family foundations in the USA, we are making good progress, although with a little over 80 memorials erected and dedicated thus far, there is a long, long way to go in pursuit of our sacred undertaking to mark every one of these sites of brutal mass murder.

In order to ensure that we have all the facts, careful attention is paid to records held in the Jewish museum in Minsk and to the archives of the local authorities responsible for the area in which a given massacre site is located. As the land required for the erection of memorials is state owned, permission must be sought from each relevant authority. On the whole, our experience has been good and in almost all cases representatives of the local authority attend the dedications in their area. Dedications are



Memorial at Mstizh.



Memorial for the Murdered Jews of the Cherven Ghetto.



Memorial at Zhylichy.



Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Ivatzevichi.

well attended, often by elderly non-Jews who were children when the killings took place. Their memories add to the indescribable melancholy of the proceedings.

Perhaps the most important lesson that flows from what our three families are doing in Belarus is this: It does not take large numbers of people or huge sums of money to do the right thing. Our project was begun by two people, later joined by three more, and despite all the obstacles associated with what might seem on the face of it to be an onerous and complex task, we have found that by harnessing the goodwill of individuals and institutions in Belarus, it has been possible to carry forward our sacred task without undue difficulty. The goodwill that exists between us and our colleagues in Belarus is a consequence of the close personal involvement we have in the project and its organization. The building of mutual trust and respect has been central to its success over a period of more than ten years.

Finally, one simple, further fact cannot go unrecorded in this short overview of our work in Belarus; namely, that there are, across a vast swathe of Eastern Europe, hundreds more sites of such shocking and unforgivable mass murder at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators that to this day remain either unknown or unmarked. Correcting this totally unacceptable deficiency must become a priority. We cannot undo what was done to these innocent souls but we can ensure that they and their suffering do not remain unknown to future generations.

Milda Jakulytė-Vasil

Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania

Jews settled and spread throughout the ethnic Lithuanian territory around the second half of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century. In a few hundred years Jews had become residents of almost every Lithuanian town (*shtetl*) and their culture, traditions and language became part of the country's everyday life. Between the two world wars there were approximately 200,000 Jews living in Lithuania, and during World War II Lithuania lost more than 90 per cent of its Jewish citizens.

During the Soviet occupation the subject of the Holocaust was off-limits for study; only since 1990 have historians been able to conduct independent research. Since then, much historical material has been published on the topic of the Holocaust in Lithuania, but usually this concerns general Holocaust history, including the activity of the German Security Police and SD operational and special squads, Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazis and the history of the ghettos. Much less attention is devoted to the Holocaust in rural locations.

In 2010 the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum and the Austrian Commemorative Service (*Verein GEDENKDIENST*) launched "The Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania." The atlas consists of structured and concentrated information on these mass murder sites in Lithuania. It is the first publication with comprehensive information on each murder site. Until the atlas was published, information was dispersed in different publications or still unpublished works available only in archives. The Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania is the first publication to fully reveal the scope of the killings throughout Lithuania.

The atlas contains collected and structured information about all currently known Jewish mass murder sites in Lithuania presented concisely, with special emphasis on the geographical location of a given mass murder. It also contains information about monuments erected at mass murder sites.

The intended audience for the atlas consists of disparate groups without much interaction, including primary and secondary school students,

academics, perhaps those searching for roots, tourists and other interested people. To serve this varied audience, the book was published and the website was created in both English and Lithuanian.

Research was based on works published by Holocaust scholars as well as on contemporary interviews with witnesses, documents from Nazi trials and other sources from the Lithuanian Central State Archive, the Lithuanian Special Archive and the Center for Lithuanian Cultural Heritage.

One of the first tasks was to locate monuments erected at mass murder sites. A list of mass murder sites was made according to information from Lithuanian municipal bodies and Lithuania's Cultural Heritage Department. The atlas includes several sites where there are no commemorative markers but that have been demonstrated to have been mass murder sites through historical investigations. Historical research on each site was done in tandem with correspondence between the authors and local municipal and cultural heritage officials. Since a quarter or even a third of the sites lacked "their own" historiography, archival materials were used to fill in the information gap.

The Holocaust Atlas provides comprehensive information on 227 mass graves and includes a map of the Holocaust in Lithuania.¹ Information is arranged based on current administrative divisions of Lithuania, by region, of which there are ten: Alytus, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Marijampolė, Panevėžys, Šiauliai, Tauragė, Telšiai, Utena and Vilnius. For each region, the information is listed by region and administrative district in alphabetical order. Each site was assigned an alphanumeric designator, the first two letters indicating the region followed by a number. These codes are indicated on the map of the area and corresponding descriptions may be found in the book by using this code. Each site description has four blocks

1 The atlas includes information about all mass murders of Jews beginning with the German-Soviet war, which started on June 22, 1941 and continued until mid-July 1944, when the Soviet Union forced the Nazis out and occupied Lithuania. Some Lithuanian historians claim that the Holocaust as an act of genocide in Lithuania really began later, in mid-August of 1941, arguing that the mass murders committed in late June and throughout July were not genocidal because they were aimed, nominally, at Communists rather than Jews, although, they concede that the number of Jewish murder victims grew over that time. In fact, it was common during this brief period for at least half if not the majority of victims to be Jewish. For that reason all the "Communist" sites where Jews were shot were included in the atlas as well.

of information: 1) a diagram of the site with a photograph or photographs of the monument; 2) a short description including the address of the site, coordinates, the perpetrators of the mass murder, number and origin of victims; 3) additional information including how to find the specific site and details about the monuments including date of installation if known, entry on the cultural heritage register and the inscription on the monument; and 4) an extract from historiographical sources or a text based on archival sources about the site. References were located in the back of the publication.

The internet site www.holocaustatlas.lt includes an interactive map of Lithuania with the mass murder sites marked. It is based on Google maps and the visitor can zoom in and out and move in the familiar way. When you click on an item you will receive a brief description, and if this is a site for which you want more information, simply press "More". The information blocks are arranged in a manner similar to that in the book and you can find the locations from which the victims originated by following the yellow lines. The website contains more photographs of Holocaust monuments than the book does. There is additional interactive and multimedia material on the website, including audio, video, witness testimonies and links to other sites and documents. The website supports filtered searches.

This project was supported by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), the Embassy of the Republic of Austria to Lithuania, the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, Austria's *Verein* GEDENKDIENST commemorative service and the Office of the Lithuanian Prime Minister.

After the initial project was completed, additional information emerged on mass Killing Sites and several hitherto unknown sites were discovered. Thus research on Lithuanian mass Killing Sites is not yet complete and the database is still being updated.

Several interesting matters came to light in the material collected in the Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania. At the onset, the main method for identifying a mass murder site was the existence of a monument at the site. In 1990 there were about 152 known mass murder sites in the country, which matched the number of monuments. Eventually, other sites began to emerge during research for the project. "The Book of Sorrow" contains photographs from 190 sites and an index of Lithuanian cities and towns where Jews once lived, and includes Jewish mass murder sites.² In 2001,

2 Joseph Levinson, *Book of Sorrow*, Vilnius: Vaga 1997.

Lord Greville Janner, chairperson of the United Kingdom's Holocaust Education Foundation, initiated a project to mark graves in the Baltic States with the goal of erecting a monument, a commemorative stone, to Holocaust victims at each site. At that time 202 Holocaust sites were known in Lithuania.³ Lord Janner's project led to the setting up of granite memorial markers at 180 sites, serving both as highway signs and commemorative markers. Two hundred and thirty-four sites were visited in the 2010-2011 period for the purpose of collecting material for the atlas. Of these mass murder sites, twelve were unmarked; five are located inside old Jewish cemeteries, which contain monuments with the inscription "Old Jewish cemetery"; and seven sites had no marker, their exact location being a matter of guesswork.⁴

Year	Number of monuments
1945–1990	152
During 1991	17
Until 1997	190
Until 2001	202
Until 2011	222 (+12 known sites without monuments)

Fig.	%	Categories of Mass Murder Sites
57	25 %	Mass Murder Site (of the Jews) and (grave) Cemetery
57	25 %	Cemetery
62	28 %	Not listed on Heritage Register
38	17 %	Mass Murder Site of the Jews + title of the village
2	1 %	Have title term "Genocide"
4	2 %	Old Jewish Cemetery
3	2 %	Various (9th, 7th, 4th Forts of Kaunas)

3 Vilniuje pristatomas holokausto vietų ženklinimo projektas, 2003-10-08, <http://www.delfi.lt/pramogos/kultura/vilniuje-pristatomas-holokausto-vietu-zenklinimo-projektas.d?id=2967243>.

4 Data from 2011. There are now 6 unmarked sites because a monument was set up in Petrašiūnai, Kaunas, on January 27, 2014.

In the table you can see how mass murder sites have been categorized. One fourth of the sites have not been entered on the cultural heritage register at all, which means they do not enjoy legal protection. Another quarter have been entered on the register, but only as cemeteries, and another quarter are called “Jewish Mass Murder Sites and Gravesites” or something similar, with variations on that combination of words. The remaining quarter are called “sites of the mass murder of the Jews of” such and such location; the majority of these have exactly that format. Only two sites are entered on the register with the word genocide in their titles. All three of the Kaunas Tsarist-era military forts where Jews were murdered – the Fourth, Seventh and Ninth Forts – are registered only as 19th century defensive fortifications.

One of the more remarkable discoveries, which cannot really be ignored, is “competition” between Holocaust sites and non-Jewish commemorative memorials (for Nazi and Soviet victims) built on the same site. There are at least four such sites in the country.

One of the more glaring examples, which fully demonstrates the lack of a set of priorities and a lack of recognition of historical events and sites, is the monument at the Rainiai Martyrs Memorial Territory in the Telšiai region of Lithuania. The Rainiai massacre was one of the crimes of the NKGB (later the KGB) in Lithuania. On the night of June 24 into the morning of June 25, 1941, a mass murder of prisoners took place near the town of Telšiai, during which 73 intellectuals, attorneys, politicians and other “enemies of the people” were tortured and killed. The Rainiai Memorial set up in 1991 is one of the main monuments to Lithuanian freedom fighters and patriots who gave their lives for their country. About 400 women who were imprisoned in the Telšiai ghetto were also murdered at the same site on December 23 and 24, 1941. The monument to the Jewish massacre was erected after Lithuanian independence.

In 2001, thanks to Lord Janner’s initiative, a commemorative marker was set up along the road there indicating directions to the site and giving the distance as 300 meters. When members of the atlas project visited the site in the summer of 2011, a map of the memorial complex was found in the parking lot next to the Rainiai Martyrdom Chapel. This map does not indicate the location of the monument to the female Jews of the Telšiai ghetto at the site. Neither could the commemorative marker along the road be found. It had been moved 200 meters back into an oak forest within the memorial complex. This situation hasn’t changed and the Jewish mass



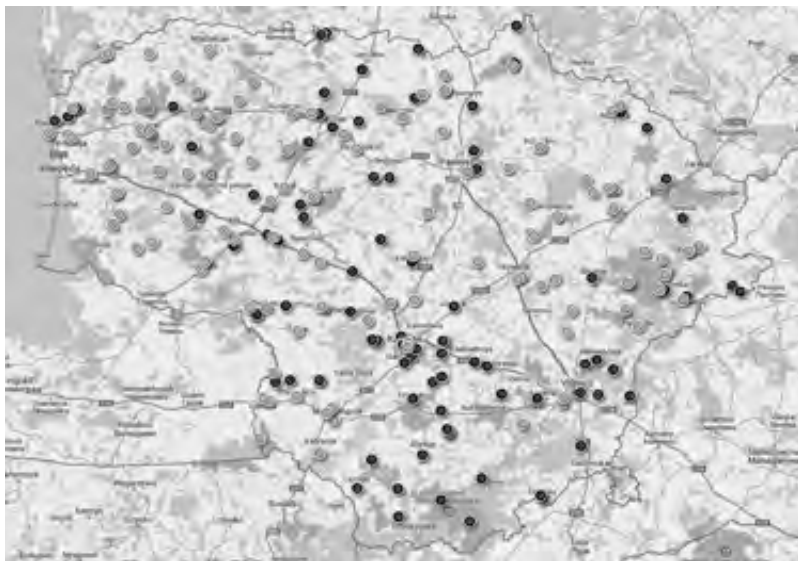
Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, 2011. Photo: Sebastian Pammer

murder site is still not indicated on the site map nor is it visible from the road.⁵

In discussing the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania and the building of monuments to commemorate their lives and deaths, another issue arises. Although the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania began in the first days of the war, most Lithuanian historians who have investigated this subject have concluded that the start of the Holocaust in Lithuania should be dated from a letter sent by police chief Vytautas Reivytiš to police departments around the country containing the order to concentrate Jews at discrete locations. This order was issued on August 16, 1941.⁶ According to this view, all mass murders before that date are somehow not part of the Holocaust. There are roughly 90 sites in Lithuania where mass murders took place between late June and early August 1941.

5 <http://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/holokausto-tragedija-nepelnytai-gozia-sovietu-nusikaltimai/>.

6 Saul Sužiedėlis/Christoph Dieckmann, *Lietuvos žydų persekiojimas ir masinės žudynės 1941 m. vasarą ir rudenį*, [The Persecution and Mass Murder of the Jews of Lithuania in the Summer and Fall of 1941], Vilnius: Margi Raštai 2006, p. 55.



Milda Jakulytė-Vasil, Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, 2011.

This means nearly half of the mass murder events are excluded from the Holocaust.⁷ Why is that important? Sites where mass murders of Communists ostensibly took place but where Jews were actually murdered are often forgotten, do not exist in the minds and memories of locals as Holocaust sites, and their monuments are either slated for destruction or maintained through the intervention of a foreign power. It is not extraordinary for ambassadors and organizations of other countries to contribute to caring for these monuments, but when commemorative inscriptions are based on political motivations, the net effect is the dissemination of incorrect information about the Holocaust in Lithuania.⁸

- 7 One of the problems is that before the Nazis and Soviets went to war special German operational groups had been constituted whose task was to identify and destroy Soviet “commissars” at the front lines, a code-word in the plans for Operation Barbarossa for Communists, Communist Youth, Jews and Roma. Barbarossa’s protocols to liquidate commissars, meaning Jews, translated into the murders of mainly young Jewish men at the beginning of the war in Lithuania.
- 8 As an example, when monuments are restored by funding from the Embassy of the Russian Federation to Lithuania and the inscription announces this is a common grave of the victims of fascism.

Epitaphs are an important element of Holocaust memorials intended to help the public understand the historical event. After the change in political régimes, i. e., after Lithuanian independence, inscriptions had to be changed because Soviet epitaphs failed to mention the fact that the “victims of fascism” were actually Jews.

A standard formulation for epitaphs has been the rule throughout Lithuania. One suspects a slight development over time, but no sudden or drastic changes in the use of the formula have been detected.⁹ After visiting almost every site and reading all the inscriptions on monuments, the only possible conclusion is that “fascist henchmen” and “bourgeoisie nationalists” were replaced with “Hitlerians” or “Hitlerite murderers and their local lackeys,” and that these formulations later evolved into the current “Nazi henchmen and their local helpers.”¹⁰

In discussing the impact of the atlas, it should be pointed out that, during the project, the Lithuanian Parliament declared 2011 the Year of Commemorating Holocaust Victims in Lithuania. Some Lithuanian municipalities tried very hard to clean up, repair and maintain the mass murder sites in 2011. After the official commemoration ended, however, interest and effort in keeping up the sites dropped off. This situation hasn’t changed much in the intervening years.¹¹

- 9 The Strošiūnai Forest site in the Kaišiadorys region provides an illustration. A commemorative marker was erected at the mass murder site there in 1964. The inscription was in Lithuanian: “Let us not forget the crimes of fascism. On August 28, 1941, the fascist henchmen brutally tortured and buried alive here 2,200 Soviet citizens: children, the elderly and women of Jewish ethnicity who lived in Žasliai, Žiežmariai and Kaišiadorys.” This was replaced with a new commemorative plaque in 1992: “The Nazi henchman and their local collaborators brutally tortured and buried half-alive about 2,200 Jewish men and women from Žasliai, Žiežmariai and Kaišiadorys here on August 28, 1941.”
- 10 Approximate statistics on the replacement of epitaphs: monuments with the “standard” phrase number about 150; surviving Soviet inscriptions and symbols about 20; monuments with non-standard inscriptions number about 15; no commemorative plaques although a monument exists number 18 (the most frequent reason for this is theft of metal plaques).
- 11 By early 2014, the situation has not changed much. Of the 59 municipalities queried, replies were received from 17. Some sort of up-keep, renovation or maintenance was carried out by six municipalities: For example, several monuments were repaired, several painted and signs were posted at several sites to guide visitors. At the majority of sites nothing has changed, i. e., some monuments still bear

Holocaust education in Lithuania is generally inadequate. The majority of teachers so far have not made use of the information provided. The atlas has been listed on the Lithuanian Education Ministry's list of recommended literature. It is also recommended by the Educational Program of the Lithuanian International Commission for the Assessment of the Crimes of the Soviet and Nazi Occupational Regimes for use in teacher-training seminars. During visits to schools as part of the Vilna Gaon Museum's educational outreach program, copies of the atlas are routinely given free of charge to teachers. Looking at web statistics for the atlas webpage, foreign visitors also predominate. There is a real lack of traffic from Lithuania. It isn't inaccurate to say the book and website remain largely unknown to the Lithuanian public.

Other projects and work have come up as a result of the atlas. One was the plan to compile a list of names of Holocaust victims in Lithuania. There wasn't time or opportunity for this during the making of the atlas, but the museum is now gradually completing a project called "Jewish communities of Lithuania in the face of the Holocaust: (Un)forgotten Names Online Database of Holocaust Victims in Lithuania" (www.holocaustnames.lt). This project is not separate and contains links to the atlas database.

In summary, although the project's influence in Lithuania has been slight to date, I remain hopeful that a firm foundation has been laid for future interest in and discussion of the Holocaust in Lithuania.

Soviet inscriptions recalling the murder of Soviet citizens, avoiding all mention of Jews. Sites that were extremely difficult to find, and sometimes almost impossible, remain without any road or path signs to direct potential visitors. Nonetheless site coordinates have been recorded and published, and anyone who wants to find them, can do so with some effort.

Vesna Teršelič

Ongoing Memory Struggles in Croatia and Other Post-Yugoslav Countries – The Case for Additional Research on the Fate of Those Murdered at “Killing Sites”

Anniversary reflections on the beginning of the Great War have temporarily brought the question of the final hostilities in the armed struggle into the spotlight. The seemingly never ending wars show that humankind has not progressed very far in prevention of genocide, war crimes and gross violations of human rights. In the Balkans, where I come from, the burden of the past and failure to acknowledge the suffering of victims killed on different sides of violent confrontations still prevents full social recovery. Atrocities from three periods – World War II, Yugoslav socialism and the wars from 1991–2001 – remain insufficiently explored. Although all the crimes from these three periods cannot be discussed here, it is important to stress that manipulation of the history and numbers of victims still burdens survivors and societies at large. In facing the chronic lack of political will for documenting facts, a new path has opened in the framework of the United Nations, linking various initiatives working on the affirmation of the right to truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence.¹ In Croatia, as in most of the countries, localizing memories of crimes committed against former fellow-citizens is yet to come. In ongoing social struggles to define the collective memory of World War II in post-Yugoslav countries,

- 1 Mr. Pablo de Greiff (Colombia) was appointed first Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. He took up his functions on 1 May 2012. Among his responsibilities the promotion of the right to truth is especially prominent. This right entitles the victim, his or her relatives and the public at large to seek and obtain all relevant information concerning the commission about the alleged violation, the fate and whereabouts of the victim and, where appropriate, the process by which the alleged violation was officially authorized.

revisionists keep on questioning tragic facts. Youth are sometimes deprived of the most basic information on the Holocaust, and other genocides committed in that period are not well covered in history textbooks. It is particularly worrying that attempts are made to forget, deny or relativize horrible crimes committed by Nazi-fascist armed forces and by state-like formations (in particular Ustasha in Croatia and Chetniks in Serbia), as well as ideologies that came up with and attempted to legitimate such crimes. The diminishing and complete denial of certain crimes is wide spread. For more than two decades we have also witnessed systematic denial and demonizing of the antifascist struggle, its legacy and values. Efforts for its reaffirmation, which have been made in Croatia in the period between 2000 and 2010, have brought limited effects despite the invested energy.

In the fierce public confrontations it does not help that many Killing Sites from World War II have not been properly researched. Systematic investigations begun in the immediate aftermath of the war were abandoned after a short period of intense processing of war crimes by military prosecutors and the conclusion of work of *the State Commission for the Establishment of Crimes Committed by Occupiers and Their Accomplices*.² A brief period of interest in the fate of victims was far from sufficient for disclosing relevant facts on the exact locations of killings and mass graves. In the following decades of socialist Yugoslavia, research was limited and often ideologically biased, supporting politically exaggerated estimations of the number of victims. Although rather numerous publications printed in the period 1945–1990 contain valuable observations, they need critical evaluation. The research on victims killed in extermination and concentration camps as well as at Killing Sites demands further attention.

Some of these Killing Sites and mass graves were identified, mostly in the years 1945–1947. Afterwards, bodily remains were exhumed and reburied in specially designated graves or in charnel houses with appropri-

2 The United Nations War Crimes Commission established in London on October 20 1943 called on all states allied in the anti-Hitler coalition against the aggressive bloc made up of Hitler Germany, Fascist Italy, militarist Japan and their satellites, to establish respective state commissions. At the 2nd session of The Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (known as AVNOJ) on November 30 1943, the decision was taken to establish a state commission (*Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača*), which functioned until April 12, 1948.

ate ceremonies, at which monuments to victims were erected. The monuments were sometimes placed on graveyards but more often at designated locations that were not necessarily linked with actual Killing Sites. Other considerations of ideological and local urban planning nature might have been more important than marking the exact place of liquidation. Nowadays the quest for accuracy is as important as it was in Yugoslav times; some sites that were memorialized were honored only in the spirit of the antifascist liberation struggle, marking all victims simply as victims of fascism, with little or no reference to Jews, Serbs or Roma or regard for the exact location of executions.

Some of the Killing Sites and mass graves were left unmarked by the liberators and many have yet to be located. The decision was based on the assumption that to emphasize positive memories of cooperation between different nations during liberation struggle rather than to emphasize the martyrdom, would better serve the purpose of post-war rebuilding and the socialist modernisation of the country. As the second Yugoslavia was largely built on the cooperation of partisans from all nations, the post-war dominant narration approved by the highest political authorities of the communist party had in its focus the ideology of “brotherhood and unity.” It was determined that there was too much talking about and remembrance of victims, and that recalling the crimes of perpetrators might overpower the positive remembrance of winning the war as part of a broad antifascist alliance and might feed exclusive nationalism, the consequence being that numerous crimes were not properly documented. The silence about post-war liquidations from 1945 to 1990 and the falsification of war crimes and other war-related events from 1941 to 2000 influenced the recent past of Yugoslavia, as well as post-Yugoslav societies.

Current estimates put the number of civilians killed by the extremist Ustasha regime as around 300.000, of which more than one third died in concentration camps.³ Although during WW II the main victims of geno-

3 The first Ustasha concentration camp, Danica, was established on April 15 1941. The deadliest in the first year of war were those camps linked to the Jadovno extermination complex of the Ustasha concentration camps connecting locations at Jadovno in Velebit and in the Slana and Metajna camps with its headquarters in Gospić. They operated from mid-June to 25 August 1941, when the Italians occupied this part of the Independent State of Croatia. The largest number of victims died in the Jasenovac concentration camp. According to research to date, the

cide in concentration camps were Jews, Serbs, Roma, as well as people of different nationalities perceived to be antifascist, the victims of deliberate mass murders were predominantly Serbs (in crimes committed by Ustasha, Nazis and the German Army)⁴ or Bosnian Muslims and Croats (in crimes committed by Chetniks and/or Italian fascists)⁵. The victims executed at Killing Sites often had lived nearby. They were killed by a variety of mobile and stationary killing units, mostly by shooting and stabbing.

Although the Ustasha regime wrongly claimed that killings were committed in reprisal for partisan attacks, systematic terror began before liberation struggle.⁶ Jews, Serbs and alleged “enemies of the Croatian people and the state” were arrested and deported to concentration camps after adoption of the *Defence of People and State Act*,⁷ even prior to adoption of the *Racial laws*,⁸ mirroring patterns from Nazi Germany. Deliberate killings had begun as well.

number can be estimated at between 80,000 and 100,000. Along with the Jasenovac concentration camp, which was in operation for the longest period, and was the largest Ustasha camp in terms of prisoner numbers and area, large camps were also founded in Krušćica, near Travnik, in Tenja, near Osijek, in Đakovo, Loborgrad, near Zlatar, and in Sisak.

- 4 Three mass killings of male Serbian civilians in Gudovac, Prekopa and Glina, which will be briefly presented later, reflect the way crimes were committed in other countries occupied by Nazis.
- 5 The most infamous crime was committed in the village of Gata by Chetniks, with logistical support from the Italian division Sassari, on October 1, 1942: 79 villagers were killed. The village was burned down.
- 6 The first partisan group in Croatia gathered in the Brezovica forest near Sisak on June 22 1941; the Yugoslav communist party called for an uprising on July 4 1941; one of the first partisan armed actions was organized in Banski Grabovac on July 23 1941; a popular uprising began on July 27 1941 in Srb.
- 7 Zakonska odredba za obranu naroda i države, adopted on April 17 1941, signed by Ante Pavelić stated: “tko na bilo koji način povrijedi ili je povrijedio čast i životne interese hrvatskog naroda ili bilo na koji način ugrozi opstanak NDH ili državne vlasti, pa makar djelo i ostalo samo u pokušaju, čini se krivcem zločina velezdaje” te “tko se učini krivcem zločina u točki 1. ima ga stići kazna smrti.”
- 8 Serbs from certain towns were deported even prior to April 30 1941, when racial laws were adopted. In Grubišno Polje 530 Serbian men were arrested in the night from April 26 to 27 1941 and transported to concentration camp Danica; some were later transported to extermination complex at Jadovno and Pag. In early Sep-

In the following paragraphs, three killings in Gudovac, Prekopa and Glina will be presented.⁹ The first two have been properly researched while the third, like many other poorly documented massacres, still needs further research, although it was described by eyewitnesses and has been the subject of scientific colloquia.¹⁰

The first documented mass killing occurred 18 days after the establishment of the Ustasha puppet Independent state of Croatia (known as NDH). Early in the morning of April 28, 1941, 195 Serbs from Gudovac, Veliko and Malo Korenovo, Prgomelj, Tuk, Breza, Stančić, Klokočevac and Bolč were arrested, allegedly because of killing “zaštitari.” In the Ustasha’s documents the action of Chetniks is mentioned; it is likely that two “zaštitari” were killed by former members of the Yugoslav Army. They were arrested by members of the “Seljačka zaštita” led by Martin Cikoš and allegedly by the Ustasha Chief of Security Eugen Dido Kvaternik himself together with some Ustasha officials from Bjelovar. Between 187 and 196 persons were executed in Gudovac at “Sajmište,” on the way to the River Plavnica, that same evening. It is important to note that most of the killers were not extremists. After two days the Nazi German Commission arrived and ordered the exhumation and photographing of the bodies. Gudovac municipal administration filed death certificates for 187 victims.

Two weeks later, on May 11, 1941, Serbs from Glina were arrested according to a list prepared in advance by the Ustasha officials. Some Croats who resisted the arrest of their neighbors were also arrested, but released the next morning. All Serbs older than 15 years of age who happened to be in Glina on these days were executed by the Ustasha in the night between May 12 and 13, 1941 in the village of Prekopa. A few hundred men of Glina’s 3,000 pre-war population were executed during just one night. According to the available data, the *State Commission for the Establish-*

tember, 2,166 of Serbs from Zagreb were arrested and later deported to Serbia, as described in books by historian Ivo Goldstein.

9 Killings in Glina were described in: Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, Zagreb: Novi Liber 2008; Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, Zagreb: Novi Liber 2001; Slavko Goldstein, 1941. *The Year That Keeps Returning*, New York: New York Review of Books 2013; Čedomir Višnjić/Branko Vujanović/ Đuro Roksanđić, *Glina 13. maj 1941*, Zagreb: Prosvjeta 2011. The killing in Gudovac was described in: Željko Kurelac, “Slučaj Gudovac,” 28. travnja 1941, Zagreb: Radovi zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Knjiga 39 2007.

10 Publication of works is expected in 2015.

ment of Crimes Committed by Occupiers and Their Accomplices exhumed the victims in 1947 and reburied their remains at the Orthodox cemetery in Glina, together with the remains exhumed from other mass graves.

Later in the year, another crime was committed by the Ustasha in Glina's Orthodox church. It is estimated that more than 600 Serbian male inhabitants of nearby villages were killed at the end of July 1941. That crime is better known in the public, although it is still not thoroughly researched. Not long after the crime, the church was demolished. Material remains of the Orthodox Church were removed. It is believed bodily remains of the victims were found in some of the mass graves exhumed by the *State Commission for the Establishment of Crimes Committed by Occupiers and Their Accomplices* in 1947. The remains were buried at the Orthodox cemetery in Glina, together with those of Serbs from Glina killed in May in Prekopa.

In the period of Yugoslav socialism, victims were remembered in a dignified way. In Gudovac remains were reburied in the charnel house built on the place of execution in 1955. The monument "Gudovčan" by sculptor Vojin Bakić was erected. In Glina on the site of the destroyed Orthodox Church, a Memorial House (Spomen dom) was opened in 1969 in front of which a sculpture, "Mother with a child," by sculptor Antun Augustinčić, was erected. On the day when the Memorial House was opened, a plaque was put up which read: "Our truth is written in blood. In this place stood an Orthodox church in which some 1,200 innocent victims found their death under the Ustasha's knife. The people of Banija stood up against the evil and the crimes and walked on light but difficult paths of a national-liberation struggle. Today in this place stands a memorial house for victims of fascism, built in 1969 in a joint action and brotherly solidarity of the people of Banija and others across our socialist homeland. (July 4, 1969)." Regular commemorations attended by official delegations have been organized on the anniversaries of the crimes.

Since early 1990s, monuments and memorials devoted to victims of Nazi and fascist collaborators and to the antifascist liberation struggle and as well as documents related to antifascism have been systematically destroyed, and left to decay.¹¹ In Gudovac, the monument of Vojin Bakić

11 More than 3,000 monuments and memorials were destroyed or damaged mostly during the last decade of the 20th century, as described in: Juraj Hrženjak (ed.), *Rušenje antifašističkih spomenika u Hrvatskoj 1990–2000*, Zagreb: Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Republike Hrvatske 2001. Although the most

was destroyed in 1991. A plaque with names of the victims was recently restored. It is worth mentioning that questions have been asked about the Cyrillic scripture on the memorial. Restorers from the Serbian National Council explained that the original plaque used Cyrillic, which is one of the official scripts used in Croatia. It is sad that additional explanation was needed at all. The plaque in Glina was removed in 1995 after the Military Operation “Storm” and has not been replaced, leaving passers-by wondering what tragic events are commemorated by the monument. At the same time, the Memorial House was renamed as Croatian House (Hrvatski dom). Several years ago, organizations of Serbs from Croatia together with the Association of Antifascist Fighters resumed organizing commemorations at Glina’s Orthodox cemetery and in front of the Culture House. Civil society organizations¹² asked for the plaque to be returned and for the name of the Memorial House to be restored. The removal of the memorial plaque from the place where innocent victims were killed and the renaming of the Memorial house are a sign of impiety towards the victims of the tragedy.

Today, at the state level, remembering Holocaust victims is mostly linked to attending annual commemorations at the Jasenovac Memorial and antifascism is reduced only to occasional marking of anniversaries of certain events that cannot be missed or ignored, although that is also followed by increasingly aggressive denial and gradual relativization.

Together with other human rights organisations, *Documenta* has collected information on human losses in the wars from 1991 – 2001 in Croatia and other post-Yugoslav countries¹³ to give back the names of as many people as possible. It would be of utmost importance to research and mark the sites from WW II also. Results of further research should serve as the basis of scholarly work in which transnational approaches should be used.

widespread wave of destruction is linked with the period before 2000, destruction continues even today.

- 12 Documenta, Civil Committee, Croatian PEN Center, Serbian National Council collected signatures of support for this initiative which were submitted to the Glina Town Council and to the mayor, with no response.
- 13 The methodology of documenting human losses is presented in: Emina Bužinkić (ed.), *Working on Dealing with the Past. A Handbook for Civil Society Organisations*, Zagreb: Documenta – Centar za suočavanje s prošlošću 2013, http://www.documenta.hr/assets/files/publikacije/Prijelom_SSP_eng_web.pdf (2015-01-26).

Countries that accept the responsibility to research Killing Sites should provide regular status reports. In Croatia, further exhumations and identification are currently under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of War Veterans.¹⁴ Local human rights organizations and civil initiatives (in particular Jewish, Serbian or Roma communities) should be invited to write critical reports or file complaints on the current situation in their country and offer recommendations.

No matter how firmly the image of Auschwitz is anchored in the consciousness of societies around the world as the site of a unique crime – the Holocaust – additional research about facts on Killing Sites would be essential for raising awareness about the fact that neighbors were killed in villages and at sites just around the corner. Further research would open the path for commemorating losses at appropriately marked sites of killing and for raising awareness of the extent of the crimes. It would also create an opportunity for younger generations to learn about the terrible crimes committed not so many years ago, and not so far from home.

14 It would be the responsibility of: Ministarstvo branitelja, Uprava za zatočene i nestale, Sektor za žrtve Drugog svjetskog rata i poslijeratnog razdoblja.

Karel C. Berkhoff

Afterword

It should be well known by now that during the Holocaust, the world's most widely commemorated genocide, more than two million of the six million murdered Jews were killed not in gas chambers but in mass shootings. But this fact is still not widely known. Moreover, many who do take a serious interest in this aspect of the Holocaust tend to ignore the matter of human remains of these victims. If asked, they might say: "Seven decades have passed since 1945; surely the Jewish men, women and children who were shot to death now rest in marked gravesites." It is terrible that, actually, most of these places containing bones and ashes – those outside extermination and concentration camps – have remained neither registered nor marked for many decades.

As this volume of essays shows, the reasons for this neglect are many, and they are likely to fascinate researchers for years to come. For instance, whereas survivors of the well-known death camps and their descendants have voiced their views and concerns about the proper ways to commemorate the genocide, in the case of the Killing Sites discussed in this volume, these voices were virtually absent. There were few survivors, and those who did raise the issue often lived in societies disapproving of public debate about private questions.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, through its Multi-Year Work Plan on Killing Sites, rightly wants to support an effort perfectly befitting its mandate. IHRA is less interested in explaining the sad state of affairs than in supporting activists and organizations that have been active in *changing* it. Identification and commemoration of the neglected Killing Sites of the Holocaust remains a truly urgent task. As the Steering Committee for the plan has emphasized, IHRA should not and cannot become yet another of the many active parties. Instead, the goal is to stimulate those organizations and individuals involved in identification and commemoration, so that they may cooperate more, sidestepping or at least reducing institutional and personal rivalries.

The conference in Krakow in January 2014, where many of these organizations and individuals were represented, was a success simply because it took place. Never before had so many who are actively involved in the difficult matter listened to each other in one and the same room. Another important step is this volume, with most presentations from the conference and some new texts.

IHRA's Steering Committee has its own definition of the places under discussion. A Holocaust *Killing Site* is a site other than a camp, selected and then used by the perpetrators for a mass killing of Jews and other victims, generally using bullets. This excludes various places, such as the graves of victims of death marches. David Silberklang of the Steering Committee emphasizes that the definition is preliminary and non-binding, but that we do need one that is generally supported. Its absence is a "major obstacle for developing comprehensive research and commemorative and educational activities and materials."

Readers of this volume will have noticed that definitions do vary widely. Some refer to the process – for instance, "murder sites" of Jews in the Former Soviet Union (Yad Vashem), "mass murder sites" (Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania), and "massacre sites" (Belarus Memorials Project). Others emphasize the human remains – for instance, "mass graves" (Lo-Tishkach) and "sites of mass graves" (Yahad – In Unum). The organizations and initiatives involved are not always explicit about why they prefer their terms to others. But the discussion has begun.

At the conference, Dieter Pohl and Caroline Sturdy Colls argued that it would be unwise to ignore non-Jewish victims interred along with Jews, or at other sites. I did not get a sense that the conference faced this matter. My personal note of caution is that although we are mostly talking about designated sites outside camps where Jews were shot (or, in the case of so many infants, buried alive), our discussion also must include the victims of the mobile gas vans, the horrific *soul-killers* as onlookers called them, in which Jews and others were gassed to death in transit.

It may also be useful to get a sense of how current legal, scholarly and colloquial traditions of the European countries involved designate these places: be it as *war graves*, *common graves*, *fraternal graves* (in Russian), or with some other term. But Sturdy Colls also expressed another note of caution at the meeting: One can also spend too *much* time and effort on wording. In her field, forensic archeology, she said, the terminologies of various crime scenes have been fine-tuned for too long.

And then, what to do with the sites? Those from a non-Jewish background in particular may be struck by the conviction of observant Jews that the scenes where the horrors took place may not be excavated because they are *sanctified*. The view that exhuming the remains would be sacrilege is in total contrast to the widespread impulse among people from a Christian background to dig up and ceremoniously rebury human bones.

It is unlikely that any of the Killing Sites will ever be protected as comprehensively as the site of the Bełżec extermination camp, where, more than a decade ago, care was taken lest soil be inadvertently removed from the surface. Sometimes state authorities become involved and impose their stance on the matter. This happened in 2010 in the forest of Vulturi in Romania, as Adrian Cioflâncă of the Alexandru Iona Cuza University of Iași reported at the conference. In accordance with the law of the land, investigators excavated the crime scene, discovering thirty-six corpses, and launched a prosecution. Romanian Jewish leaders protested but eventually participated in the reburial in a cemetery in Iași.

And of course in the case of certain controversial sites, elected officials face loud demands from voters for excavation. Rabbi Michael Schudrich of Poland emphasizes, however, that in such cases creativity – a mutual willingness to compromise – goes a long way. At the Polish town of Jedwabne, where Jews were murdered by their non-Jewish neighbors, Rabbi Schudrich ultimately did not oppose a small violation of Jewish law. The remains stayed where they were but the surface was removed so that a public prosecutor could study the bones and take pictures. Meanwhile, the Polish Ministry of Justice told the public that it was an exhumation.

Yahad – In Unum says that the places Father Patrick Desbois and his team have found since 2004 generally had not been marked or memorialized by the time the team encountered them. The Paris-based organization believes that protection is best served by *avoiding* publicity and *not* changing the situation. The sites are carefully registered but should remain unmarked. This may seem odd, given Yahad's conviction that locals almost always knew where their Jewish neighbors were killed. But Desbois' organization fears vandalism and grave looting. Other actors in the field to date seem more eager to change the situation on the ground. For instance, Meylakh Sheykhnet of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (Vaad) of Ukraine says that vandalism can and does occur precisely when there is no intervention, when officials and judges do not take steps to protect the sites.

One of the many challenges will be how to reconcile concerns for abuse of the sites (which is often kept off the record) with the growing hopes for an international database that will serve the public and dovetail with the extant public databases such as Yad Vashem's Untold Stories and Lo-Tishkach's Database of European Jewish Burial Grounds.

Our source of hope can be that many non-Jews living near the sites are said to be open to the memorialization efforts. Agnieszka Nieradko of Poland's Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries reported that at ceremonies for the placement of memorial stones, relieved locals (who sometimes had been afraid of the anonymous graves) asked why it had taken so long. Locals in Ukraine, Sheykhets said, often ask him why the rest of the world is not reaching out to help. With IHRA now involved, may public awareness grow and solutions be found.

Authors

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Patrick Desbois is a Catholic priest and President of Yahad – In Unum. In 2004, he began to research the story of the Jews, Roma and other victims murdered in Eastern Europe during WWII by the Nazi mobile killing units, the Einsatzgruppen. His work through Yahad has been recognized through numerous awards and commentary in France and internationally.

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Lea Prais leads a research projects at the International Institute for Holocaust Research of Yad Vashem: “The Untold Stories” – murder sites of Jews in the former Soviet Union and was the editor in chief of the Hebrew online version of The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust, and was a member of the staff of historians that developed the exhibition of Yad Vashem's new historical Museum.

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Michael Lazarus and Diana Lazarus founded the Simon Mark Lazarus Foundation in 2003. In 2006 they were joined by the Miles and Marilyn Kletter Family Foundation and the Warren and Beverly Geisler Family Foundation. Together with Jewish communities and organizations across Belarus these three foundations established the Committee for the Preservation of Holocaust Victims’ Memory in the Republic of Belarus, which provides crucial support in identifying the locations and coordinating the construction of Holocaust memorials.

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More than 2,000,000 Jews were killed by shooting during the Holocaust at several thousand mass killing sites across Europe. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) aims to raise awareness of this centrally important aspect of the Holocaust by bringing together organizations and individuals dealing with the subject. This publication is the first relatively comprehensive and up-to-date anthology on the topic that reflects both the research and the fieldwork on the killing sites.

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