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ACCESSING CAMPSCAPES: INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES FOR USING EUROPEAN CONFLICTED HERITAGE

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EDITORIAL: THE POLITICS OF DEAD BODIES

Whereas political violence and resulting (mass) death are by no means new phenomena, recent decades have seen a radical change in the ways their legacies are being managed, investigated, and experienced. Attention has increasingly focused on material legacies and material evidence, initiating a cultural, political and scientific shift towards objects and bodies in the framings of the sites of political violence and juridical engagements with the perpetrators. Now considered to be critical sources of evidence in criminal proceedings, while also being subjects of various ethical, religious, political concerns, dead bodies have assumed unprecedented centrality in this process. They are searched for, exhumed, and reburied, with their material presence (re)shaping responses to (mass) political death and calling forth new practices, discourses, and imaginaries. Dead bodies have thus become the subject of a growing body of research. Following this trajectory, this issue of our e-journal aims to analyse the actors that are still far too often neglected in research on camps: dead bodies and the dense politics that surrounds them.

Bringing together contributions written by archaeologists, forensic scientists, memory scholars and historians, this issue is structured around the concept of necropolitics or the politics of dead bodies. The meaning of necropolitics we adopt nevertheless diverges from the one already established in the field of political philosophy and critical theory. For scholars such as Achille Mbembe or Giorgio Agamben, the term encompasses the sovereign's right to expose others to death, to dictate who may live and who has to die, thus capturing the shift from a political regime that administers life (biopower) to one based on the imposition of death. Here, necropolitics is constructed in broader terms, to encompass a multilayered and multifaceted set of political, cultural, religious, and

material processes through which the dead are managed, governed, inscribed with meaning, represented, mobilized symbolically and politically, and subjected to social, cultural and/or political inclusion/exclusion. It therefore pertains as much to practices of killing and dispossession of corpses by perpetrators as to their handling and framing in the aftermath of violence by affected communities, authorities, state and investigative bodies – and also by researchers tasked with recovering and analysing human remains, such as archaeologists or forensic experts. Focusing on various historical and contemporary cases, the authors examine the significance of the material presence (or absence) of dead bodies, and the various practices that surround them, for the politics and memory of camps and their ever-changing cultural representations.

It is often claimed that one of the most important developments leading to, and epitomizing, the fundamental shift in the position of the dead within contemporary cultural and political imaginaries, especially those shaped in response to political violence, is the turn towards forensics and forensic investigation as a means to unearth, address, collect, preserve and present the evidence of war crimes, genocides and human rights violations. This turn has acquired global scale since the 1980s, with mass graves of the immediate and more distant past being opened, investigated, and exhumed throughout the world, including the graves of the most recent civil-military dictatorship in Argentina, the genocide in Rwanda, the Yugoslav Wars, the Spanish Civil War, and many others. Whether collected as evidence for criminal proceedings or for the purposes of identification and repatriation to relatives, dead bodies remain crucial for the engagement with and representation of political violence.

In recent decades, the camps of the Second World War and the Holocaust have likewise become sites of intense archaeological and forensic effort. This is evident here, for instance, in the contribution written by Marek Jasinski, Kate Spradley and Andrzej Ossowski, which examines the long-term attempts at recovering the bodies of the victims of the concentration camp at Falstad in Norway, something that has been given new impetus thanks to collaboration with forensic anthropologists, archaeologists and geneticists within the iC-ACCESS project. In her contribution, Caroline Sturdy Colls discusses her archaeological research at Holocaust camps, where exhuming and disturbing the burial sites of these sites' (predominantly) Jewish victims is prohibited by the laws of the Halakha. It is the religious framing, she explains, that prevents archaeologists and forensic experts from investigating graves and bodies, stirring many controversies and leading to tabooisation of the topic in this context. One such controversy, resulting in the consolidation of the strict no-exhumation policy pertaining to Holocaust graves that governs their contemporary treatment, is addressed by Jean-Marc Dreyfus. He writes about the failed attempt in 1958 to perform a large-scale investigation of mass graves at the Hohn cemetery at the Bergen-Belsen camp by the governmental French Search Mission, an act fiercely contested by the German Jewish community, Jewish survivors of the camp, and various rabbinical authorities. However, until the late 1950s, the recovery, exhumation, investigation, and reburial of human remains often met with the endorsement, if not direct involvement, of rabbis, with the graves at camps being examined in early postwar years by various investigative commissions, whether Soviet, Polish, US, Norwegian, or French. The fact that those early postwar practices that unfolded at the sites of former Nazi camps remain relatively unknown and have only become the subject

of scholarly engagement very recently, could itself be indicative of a cultural and scholarly shift in relation to the dead and the politics of dead bodies in research on camps.

It is in this context that Marianne Neerland Soleim's contribution could be read. It deals with the political dynamics behind and implications of the mass exhumation and reburial of the bodies of Soviet Prisoners of War in early 1950s Norway. Entangled in the political dynamics of the Cold War and based on the othering of non-Norwegian victims of the German occupation, Operation Asphalt is a perfect example of early postwar necropolitics at work. However, Soleim's article moves beyond that moment to focus on the long-term results of this exercise in the politics of dead bodies for Norwegian memory of the war. She shows that it has significantly contributed to the experience and suffering of the Soviet POWs being forgotten, or even rendered invisible, a state of affairs that continues until this day. Kobi Kabalek's text likewise revolves around invisibilities and silences: examining the accounts of cannibalism in the testimonies of camp survivors, he critically investigates the affective and representational politics behind their muting in oral history and historical research, while also showing how the reference to cannibalism, an ultimate violation of the dignity of the dead and the 'humanity' of the living, has served as a means of conveying the liminal experience of the camps to oneself and others. What he makes manifest is that it is not only what is done to/with the bodies but how (and if) they are spoken about that matters.

Zuzanna Dziuban (University of Amsterdam/Free University of Berlin)

THE MASS GRAVES OF HOHNE AND THE FRENCH ATTEMPT (AND FAILURE) AT EXHUMATION (1958-1969)

01

The Bergen-Belsen Memorial is today one of the most widely visited former concentration camps and sites of terror in Germany. It is a 'city of memorials', with a complex structure of commemoration and many layers of memory.¹ There are many individual memorials, a symbolic tombstone for Anne Frank, a place of worship, and a huge museum. Bergen-Belsen is known and remembered for the gruesome images that were taken by British troops immediately following the liberation of the camp on April 15, 1945. These images have often been taken from the (heavily edited) newsreels shown in cinemas in Britain and all over Europe.² They were also widely used in subsequent documentary movies shown both at Nuremberg and in other high-profile trials, and with the aim of 'reeducating' the Germans. The many visitors to the Memorial do not know (and are not told) that the site is also a huge cemetery, with the corpses seen in the photographs displayed within the museum, located not far away from them – not in Bergen-Belsen itself but in the nearby military camp at Hohne (where the SS barracks were located). Today, the camp belongs to the Bundeswehr; after the fall of communism and the reunification of Germany, it was transferred from the British troops that had occupied it for decades. In contrast to other camp sites in Germany, no exhumations have been performed in Bergen-Belsen and no attempts have been undertaken to rebury the corpses in individual, identified, decent graves.³ In Dachau, for example, the mass graves of the Leitenberg (about 10 000 corpses of inmates who died in the last weeks of the camp's existence and following

1 See the website of the Memorial <https://bergen-belsen.stiftung-ng.de/en/>.

2 On those images, see for instance the seminal Susanne Bardgett and David Cesarani (eds.), *Belsen 1945: New Historical Perspectives*, London/Portland 2006.

3 The treatment of corpses that had not been cremated and which were found when the camps were liberated or abandoned by the guards remains a dark spot of the research on the camp and Holocaust memory.

its liberation), were opened from 1952 onwards. Some corpses were identified and repatriated (mostly to France), while others were put in mass graves as part of a landscaped memorial cemetery that today forms part of the official Dachau memorial.

None of this happened at Bergen-Belsen. Not because no plans were drawn up to exhume over 12 000 dead bodies of victims who, after the liberation of the camp, died from exhaustion, disease (typhus) or as a consequence of mistreatment by SS guards. The driving force behind the plan to exhume was the *Mission Garban*, an offspring of the ministry of Veterans, War Victims and Deportees.⁴ The mission was named after Pierre Garban, its director between 1946 and 1965. Launched in 1946, it took over from the French occupation forces, which had started exhuming any corpses considered 'French', whether those of fallen soldiers or any category of deportee (Resistance fighters, Jews or hostages). The French mission was far from the only one to search for the bodies of its nationals; Italy, Belgium and Norway, for example, instigated similar operations. Representatives of the *Mission Garban* toured the sites of concentration camps, went along the roads of death marches, and exhumed a total of 50 000 corpses, including 7000 that were identified as French by means of traditional forensic techniques of identification. Information given by survivors on the circumstances of death was taken into consideration, as well as the measurements of corpses provided by the families and close examinations of victims' teeth.

4 I am currently writing a monograph about Mission Garban. My research is informed by the fact that postwar exhumation of deportees have not only been forgotten in the social and cultural realms but have indeed been neglected by the current, though extensive, research on the aftermath of deportations. On the mission, see Jean-Marc Dreyfus, *Renationalizing Bodies? The French Search Mission for the Corpses of Deportees in Germany, 1946–58*, in: Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (eds.), *Human Remains and Violence: Methodological Approaches*, Manchester 2015, The volume is accessible in open access at [file:///C:/Users/Jean-Marc/Downloads/628394%20\(9\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Jean-Marc/Downloads/628394%20(9).pdf)



Bodies of Bergen-Belsen victims loaded into a mass grave at Hohné, April/May 1945, source unknown (<http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/Database/MassGravesPhotographs.asp?MassGraveID=20&PhotographsID=1352&index=0>).

At first, the *Mission Garban* only opened graves containing small numbers of corpses. The forensic techniques employed after the First World War somehow seemed to have been forgotten – then huge mass graves were opened and soldiers' corpses repatriated to families. It was only from 1956 on that the French mission dared to open increasingly larger graves. The last endeavour was to be performed at Bergen-Belsen. In April 1958, everything was prepared, with tents installed at the site to shelter the equipment that was to be used to disinter and examine the corpses. However, this coincided with April 15, which is the day of the anniversary of the liberation of the camp; at this time, a small group of camp survivors were holding a ceremony at the site and they spotted the equipment and the facilities. Upon learning that French officials were about to exhume the dead, the survivors immediately notified Joseph Rosensaft, the leader of the International Committee of Bergen-Belsen. Rosensaft, at that time a resident of New York, was himself a survivor and, after the liberation, the leader of the Jewish committee of the Displaced Persons' Camp established at the site. Rosensaft was well connected and apprised Nahum Goldmann, the president of the World Jewish Congress, who raised the issue with Konrad Adenauer.⁵

From the very beginning, this controversy over the exhumations at Bergen-Belsen was handled at the highest political level. Several interest groups engaged with the idea of exhumations, favouring or opposing it for various reasons. The survivors of Bergen-Belsen were supported by the organised West-German Jewish community, the *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*. Although their demand for the graves to remain untouched was never formally based on Jewish religious law, they consulted various rabbis to ascertain their opinion. When asked, German rabbis opposed the exhumations on religious grounds. The Israeli chief rabbi, in turn, permitted

⁵ There are many archival materials pertaining to this controversy. I mostly used the diplomatic archives of the French Ministère des Affaires étrangères (La Courneuve, EU, RFA, n° 1706, 3037) and the German Diplomatic Archives in Berlin (PAAA, B86).

disinterment. He, too, quoted religious reasons (to give at least some Jews a Jewish funeral and to bury them in a Jewish cemetery). Jacob Kaplan, the Chief Rabbi of France, also approved exhumations. Associations of French deportees, mostly Resistance fighters in support of the mission's endeavours, lobbied the French government and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They claimed that the French had the right to exhume and repatriate the corpses of their comrades in arms to French soil. The Jewish representatives from the other side accused them of nationalism.⁶ Yet, in reality, the West German authorities could hardly prevent the exhumations, as a French-German agreement on the 'consequences of deportation', which granted the French Government the right to repatriate the corpses of all deportees from the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG], had been signed in October 1954.

Several attempts at negotiations were made, with meetings taking place in Paris under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nahum Goldmann met with French Jewish leaders and German diplomats to strike a deal. Several solutions were suggested: it was proposed that limited exhumations could be permitted but only if the French could prove that they had precise information about the localisation of the corpses they were looking for. This was, of course, impossible, especially in view of the hasty and disordered condition in which thousands of corpses had been buried in huge mass graves in April and May of 1945. The proposed solutions were never implemented and for years the situation remained at a standstill. The French associations of Resistance fighters were determined to see the exhumations start as soon as possible. At that time, the most influential association was the *Réseau du Souvenir*. Its members were not communists and were politically well-connected in Gaullist circles. On its behalf, the duchess d'Ayen, the widow of Jean de Noailles d'Ayen, wrote

⁶ For a more detailed description of the negotiations, see Jean-Marc Dreyfus, *L'impossible réparation. Déportés, biens spoliés, or nazi, comptes bloqués, criminels de guerre*, Paris 2015, 180-191.

to Maurice Couve de Murville, who was at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs. Her husband had been deported to Neuengamme and from there transferred on a death march to Bergen-Belsen, where he died on April 13, 1945, two days before the liberation of the camp. In her letter, the duchess pointed out a contradiction in the position of the Jewish families and organisations. She rightly noted that some French Jewish families had seen the remains of a relative repatriated by the *Mission Garban*. In April 1959, a small delegation of French survivors visited Hohne only to find that some of the small number of tombstones erected at the site had been desecrated by anti-Semites.

An Arbitration Commission first was called to life in 1965 by the Europe desk of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; this was permitted by the 1955 Bonn agreement on German sovereignty. A diplomatic agreement was signed in June 1966 to create the Commission. The Commission organised consultations, with memorandums from both sides (in this case, the French state and the Federal Republic of Germany). The German delegation worked closely with the *Zentralrat*, which was represented by its general-secretary Henrik van Dam. Long and detailed hearings were held in the Koblenz castle, where the Commission had its seat. In its detailed memorandum, the French delegation explained the techniques it employed to exhume and identify deportees' corpses. In the case of the prospective works at Bergen-Belsen, the investigations were to be based on a few identified graves; the French claimed to have at their disposal a precise count of Jewish and non-Jewish victims (1700 and 980 respectively) buried in the Hohne mass graves. These debates are fascinating precisely because they are indicative of the state of memory in the mid-1960s – the emphasis was on the memory of Resistance but Jewish memory was on the rise. The lawyer Arrighi, the spokesperson for the French delegation, advocated a universalised memory of deportation in order to sustain its demand for exhumations. Some of his statements were dubious, leaning as they did towards anti-Semitic tropes. He also contrasted the weight of the French rabbinate, which represented 600 000 Jews, to that of its German

counterpart, where 35 000 Jews lived at the time. The court even travelled to Bergen-Belsen and the visit was reported by three mainstream media outlets: the German weekly *Stern*, *The New York Times* and *Associated Press*. There was no further press coverage of this year-long debate. Only on 30 October 1969, more than 11 years after the controversy started, did the Arbitrary Commission reach its decision. Exhumations were refused. Eight judges opposed them with only one vote in dissension (the French judge). Strangely enough, the main argument advanced by the Commission centred on the meaning of the 'landscape of memory': the landscape of the camp site was seen as part of survivors' memory and should be respected. In this sense, the exhumations would disturb this set landscape. To this day, no exhumations have taken place in Bergen-Belsen.

This specific case is interesting in many ways: it shows the last attempt to exhume large graves in Germany and it is a reminder of the importance of postwar exhumations not only in the FRG, but also across Europe. It documents the process of differentiation between the memory of the Holocaust and the memory of resistance and deportations. It also illuminates how, very early on, politicians at the highest level had to deal with issues of memory and religious sensitivities. The minimal press coverage contrasts, nevertheless, with the high-profile controversies that would emerge in the 1980s and 1990s, such as the one around the Carmelite Convent at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

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Individual tombstone at
Hohne cemetery.
Photo by Sytse
Wierenga.



Hohne cemetery today.
Photo by Sytse Wierenga.



GRAVES OF THE 'OTHER': NORWAY AND THE COMMEMORATION OF SOVIET PRISONERS OF WAR

Between 1941 and 1945, nearly 100,000 Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) were transported to Norway. About 90,000 of them were soldiers of the Red Army and nearly 9,000 were so-called *Ostarbeiter*.¹ The people in these two categories were Soviet citizens driven into forced labour by and for the Germans. Among them there were about 1,400 women and 400 children. In Norway alone, the Germans established nearly 500 prison camps for the Soviet POWs, most of them in the northern part of the country.² The size of the camps varied from a few prisoners to several thousand in the same camp. According to the Norwegian War Grave Service and information from German prison cards, approximately 13,700 Soviet POWs died in Norway during the War.³ Other sources quote different figures: Soviet authorities claimed that the number of missing soldiers reached 16,000;⁴ German sources give a number of about 7,000.⁵ The history of Soviet POWs provides a good example of how dramatic war experiences from the Eastern front were transferred to Norway, with both individual and collective memories connected to these prisoners indicating a will (or the lack of thereof) to remember 'Others' in a national context.

The memory of other nationalities and their wartime suffering on Norwegian soil are mainly part of a local narrative. While the subject of Soviet prisoners of war is common knowledge in local historical studies,

1 RA, Kontoret for flyktninge-og fangespørsmål, eske 0417. Flyktninge-og fangedirektoratet: Final Report, Prisoners of War executive, Headquarters Allied Land Forces Norway. H.Q. B.L.F.N. Oslo, 14 December 1945.

2 Soleim, Marianne Neerland, *Sovjetiske krigsfanger i Norge: Antall, organisering og repatriering*, Oslo 2009, 5-6.

3 RA, Krigsgravtjenestens arkiv og tyske fangekort over sovjetiske krigsfanger fra databasen www.obd-memorial.ru.

4 RA, Krigsgravtjenesten, *sovjetiske krigsgraver 1946-1952*, boks 26.

5 Ibid.



Dunderland monument:
monument destroyed during
"Operasjon asphalt".
Photo by Marianne N. Soleim.

both oral and written, there is virtually no space for a living memory about the Soviet POWs on a national level. Despite forming the largest group of casualties on Norwegian soil during the war, the Soviet POWs have not been included at the national level of the Norwegian history of occupation.⁶ One reason for this absence is the prisoners' destiny after their repatriation to their homeland in 1945. Around 84,000 Soviet citizens were repatriated from Norway, and until the beginning of the 1990s there was almost no contact between Norwegians and former Soviet prisoners. Another, and perhaps a more important reason, points back to a set of politically charged practices that in the early postwar years evolved around the human remains of the Soviet POWs.⁷ Known under the codename Operation Asphalt, they involved mass exhumation and reburial of the bodies and, in a longer run, contributed to effective removal of the Soviet victims of the war from the national memorial landscape.

A few years after the surviving POWs were sent home, the dead Soviet victims of the German occupation received considerable publicity in Norway. In 1951, the Norwegian government decided to move graves of the Soviet POWs from Finnmark, Troms and Nordland to Tjøtta War Cemetery on the Helgeland coast outside Sandnessjøen. The work was given the codename Operation Asphalt probably because the excavated bodies were transported in asphalt bags. The planning of Operation Asphalt began in 1948 with the aim of establishing a joint graveyard to which all remains of Soviet POWs, exhumed from the burial sites spread throughout the northern part of the country, would be relocated. The excavations carried out within the framework of the Operation Asphalt constituted an extensive task for the Norwegian authorities.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion, see my Introduction in: Marianne Neerland Soleim (ed.), *Prisoners of War and Forced Labour: Histories of War and Occupation*, Newcastle Upon Tyne 2010.

⁷ On Operation Asphalt see Marianne Neerland Soleim, 'perasjon Asfalt': Kald krig om krigsgraver, Stamsund 2016.

They covered approximately 200 grave sites, 95 of which were located in the three northernmost counties. The relocation of Soviet POWs was completed in 1951. In the aftermath, several further victims were buried at Tjøtta. In 1952, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that 8804 Soviet POWs had been transferred to the site, of whom 978 had been identified. Obviously, it was difficult to get an exact number from the material after the move was completed. The figures provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1952 do not correspond with information given at the monument at Tjøtta, which lists 6725 unknown and 826 identified victims.

Many monuments dedicated to the dead POWs located at the local burial sites were demolished in the process, while some of those destroyed memorials are still visible near the roads in the mountains. The Norwegian authorities presented several arguments to justify the operation, with the monuments at the centre of their argument. It was claimed that the monuments made moving the corpses difficult, that they prevented local farmers from cultivating the land and, finally, that they spoiled the view for the tourists along the main road. All these arguments had no basis in reality. The monuments were not placed above the graves, there were no farmers who needed to remove them in order to get access to their fields and, moreover, most of the monuments were not placed in central areas along the main road but rather in forests or in hidden places. The real, unofficial reason for exhumations, reburials, and destruction of the monuments was the Norwegian government's fear of Soviet espionage. The Norwegian officials did not want to give the Soviet authorities any opportunity to honour the memory of dead Soviet prisoners, considering their visits to the sites merely an excuse to tour sensitive military areas.⁸ At the beginning of the Cold War, this was a convincing argument to justify Operation Asphalt. While the local community in several towns in northern Norway tried to stop the operation, they only succeeded in

⁸ Ibid., 373.

one locality.⁹ Protests and demonstrations in these towns are indicative of the strong individual sympathy among Norwegians towards the memory of the Soviet prisoners who died in Norway, but the operation also led to a weakening of collective memory of the prisoners on the local level. Entangled in the political tensions of the Cold War, the conditions surrounding the relocation of Soviet war graves in Northern Norway contributed to the invisibility of the fate of Soviet POWs on Norwegian soil. Operation Asphalt briefly drew attention to the POWs – the destruction of memorials and the secrecy of the excavation work rendered locals in northern Norway into horrified spectators of what they described as macabre actions. But, I argue, in a long term, resulted in an important aspect of Norwegian occupation history being forgotten. Physically, the excavation and destruction of the memorials removed the only anchor that could provide the basis for a worthy and lasting memory of the fate of the thousands of Soviet POWs who died in Norway during the war.

Immediately after the liberation in 1945, the Soviet POWs were generally afforded attention and sympathy. By 1970s, they had disappeared from Norwegian national memorial landscape. The politics of memory in the country has hardly included Soviet POWs. Until the 1990s, in cultural celebrations it was mainly Norwegian victims of the war that were remembered, while many schoolbooks still do not mention the Soviet prisoners. Since the late 1980s, awareness and knowledge of the Soviet POWs fate in Norway has been increasing. From the beginning of the 1990s, we have several examples of Soviet POWs who have contacted (or been contacted) by private individuals in Norway and returned to commemorate their wartime experiences. Academic research, local celebrations and Soviet veterans visiting Norway have provided an opportunity to inscribe the former prisoners into collective memory in the country. Several museums and local people are working with the

⁹ RA, Krigsgravtjenesten, Notat, Gravsaken Mo i Rana, Oslo, 2 November 1951.

preservation of the memory and history of the Soviet victims of the war, while in some places the monuments have been restored, becoming an important part of local remembrance. In several local communities in Norway, the culture of remembrance of the Soviet prisoners is strong. On May 1 (International Workers' Day) or May 8 (Liberation Day) there are often speeches or special arrangements at the Soviet war graves.¹⁰ Yet, these efforts remain fragmentary and unfold mostly at the local level. Reflecting the conflicts of memory in Norway more generally, local memory is not visible on a national level and the forms of remembering are dependent on a local initiative.

War cemeteries are places invested with a certain symbolic value. The anonymity present there not only reminds us of the one soldier who died, but also about the bloodbath of the war. In Norway, the establishment and maintenance of war monuments and memorials dedicated to Soviet POWs are also dependent on local initiatives. The absence of memorials or a lack of interest in them gives us a clear signal about the will of communities to remember the destiny of other nationalities that died on Norwegian soil during the Second World War. Nowadays, more than forty memorials have been erected to the memory of the dead Soviet prisoners in Norway. Where the victims' names are known, they have been listed on the monuments.¹¹

There are several monuments at Tjøtta International War Cemetery. The main memorial, a seven-metre-high monolith, was unveiled in 1953. It bears the inscription: "In grateful memory to the Soviet Russian soldiers that lost their lives in Northern Norway during the war 1941-1945 and

¹⁰ One example is the Russian Embassy's participation at commemoration arrangements on May 1 at Ørmelen in Verdal and in the Falstad Forest. This kind of commemoration has been continued since 1945 at Ørmelen and since the 1960s in the Falstad Forest.

¹¹ A lot of local communities have taken care of the monuments where the names of the victims are known.

who are buried here.”¹² Another, smaller monument gives the number of 7,551 victims buried at Tjøtta. At the graveyard, one can also find nameplates, placed on the ground, for the 826 identified victims. In 2002, all the nameplates were removed from the graves by the Central War Grave Service authorities in Oslo; the Soviet prisoners were again reduced to anonymous victims.¹³ The quoted reasons for the removal were pragmatic: the nameplates sank down into the ground and damaged the lawnmower while maintaining the memory location. The decision to remove the plaques met with protests from local people and local authorities. Most of this local engagement had its background in the catastrophe of the ship *Rigel* in the autumn of 1944, which took place near the future cemetery. Over 2,000 Soviet POWs lost their lives as result of the British airstrike, killed by the bombs directly or by the ensuing fire on board the ship. Only the strongest and those who could swim saved their lives. Today, apart from some iron scrap by the sea there are no visible traces of this catastrophe. The victims are buried at Tjøtta; a memorial that commemorates their tragic death was unveiled on December 1, 1977.¹⁴ Representatives from the Russian Embassy in Oslo, the Norwegian Government, the Norwegian Defence and local authorities participated in the ceremony. The Tjøtta name plates were restored only at the end of 2008. Yet this solution is not permanent.¹⁵

One of the reasons for this is the fact that in 2009, the Norwegian governmental War Grave Service and the Falstad Memorial and Human Rights Centre launched a project *War Graves Seek Names* that seeks to establish the identity of the unknown Soviet POWs buried in Norway (a project in which I was personally involved). It is based on research into prison cards obtained from Russian archives. By 2009, only 2,700 of the

¹² Helgelands Blad, undated, 1953.

¹³ Helgeland Arbeiderblad, 6 November 2008.

¹⁴ Helgelandsblad, 1 December 1977.

¹⁵ Helgeland Arbeiderblad, 6 November 2008.

Soviet victims had been identified by name thanks to material available in the register of the Norwegian War Grave Service. With the help of the newly launched identification project, we have been able to establish over 4,000 new names of the Soviet POWs. For this purpose, we make use of the Russian database OBD Memorial with digitalized prison cards from Russian and German archives. The database www.krigsgraver.no, which provides information on the identified dead, was inaugurated on March 23, 2011. According to the plans of the War Grave Service, once the project concludes, all newly identified names will be set up at the Tjøtta International War Cemetery.¹⁶

The Falstad Memorial and Human Rights Centre represents another local memorial site with national and international perspectives. Situated in mid-Norway, in the main building of the former Prison Camp SS *Strafgefangenenlager Falstad*, this national education and documentation centre was officially opened in October 2006 (the foundation was established already in 2000).¹⁷ The museum exhibition *Face to Face* consists of eleven rooms covering the development of Nazism, the establishment of the Third Reich, the SS and the concentration camps, the politics of race and the euthanasia programme, the war on the Eastern Front, the Norwegian Holocaust and the history of SS *Strafgefangenenlager Falstad*. The fate of the Norwegian Jews and Soviet POWs form an important part of the exhibition. The post-war years, including the trials against German war criminals, the development of the United Nations and human rights, genocide, crimes against humanity and mass murder after 1945 are the topics addressed in the final rooms. The exhibition highlights the development of modern human rights. The material used in the exhibition comes mainly from the collections of the Falstad Museum archive, including letters, diaries, paintings, uniforms and interviews with former prisoners.

¹⁶ FAD, Merking på Tjøtta sovjetiske krigskirkegård, Høringsnotat, 4 June 2012.

¹⁷ http://falstadsenteret.no/3_stiftelsen/arsberetning%202002.pdf and <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/aktuelt/taler> (12 May 2018).

The Centre's focus on the wartime and postwar fate of the Soviet POWs is articulated most powerfully in the Falstad Forest – a former execution and burial site located one kilometre south of the museum building. Approximately 220 prisoners of the camp were killed there between 1942 and 1943: about 100 Soviet POWs and 74 Yugoslavian and 43 Norwegian political prisoners.¹⁸ Every year on May 1, representatives of the Russian Embassy in Oslo take part in commemorations of the Soviet prisoners of war at the site. Many local people also participate in the ceremony. This connection between the embassy and the local residents is crucial for preserving the memory of both Soviet and Norwegian victims shot in Falstad Forest. Two monuments erected in the forest are dedicated to all victims, regardless of their nationality.

In the Mo i Rana area of northern Norway, too, the memory of the Soviet POWs has been preserved through local efforts. In 2004, the local historical society together with the residents restored and unveiled a previously destroyed monument for the Soviet victims at Hjartåsen in Rana.¹⁹ This type of commitment to local history, which includes victims from a foreign country, invests collective memory with a broader perspective. The remembrance of the Soviet victims in local communities in northern Norway demonstrates that it is possible, and desirable, to remember the destiny of other prisoners' who died on Norwegian soil. Such local remembrance offers us a good opportunity to examine how efforts undertaken by small communities transform broader awareness and memory of the war. The work of local communities and museums to maintain the memory of the Soviet victims is also important in the education of younger generations. Yet, despite this growing interest in the history of the Soviet POWs there is still a lot of work to be done in order to transfer this remembrance from the local to national level.

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¹⁸ Jon Reitan, Face to Face (exhibition catalogue), Falstadsenteret 2006, 47.

¹⁹ <http://www.russia.no/s/rb-06-minnet-lever.pdf> (12 Mai 2018).

The monument at Vestre gravlund (transl. Western Cemetery) in Oslo. On the side is the monument we find a text in Norwegian and Russian: "Commemorating Soviet soldiers who fell fighting a common cause, 1941–1945. Erected by grateful Norwegians.». A plaque next to it states: «Here rest 347 Soviet soldiers who fell in Norway in the war years 1941–1945". None of the 347 fallen are mentioned by name on the cemetery, although most of the names are known. Photo by Arne Langås.



Individual grave markers at Tjøtta in 2014. In 2015, more than 80 new name tablets (alphabetical lists with more than 4000 names) were placed on the cemetery wall. The new tablets include both those buried in individual (marked) graves and those buried in the collective grave (unmarked). Photo by Arne Langås.



Index card for Soviet POW who was buried near the POW camp at Bjørnelva, Nordland County; in 1951 re-buried at the Soviet war-cemetery at Tjøtta. His name is now inscribed on the new memorial tablets on the cemetery wall. (Source: obd-memorial.ru)

DEAD BODIES OF THE ENEMY: HIDDEN GRAVES IN THE FALSTAD FOREST

On the evening of May 4, 1945, several lorries with German soldiers from Trondheim arrived at the infamous *SS Straffgefängelslager Falstad*, the biggest punishment prison camp established in Central Norway during the Nazi occupation. The following night, the lorries drove repeatedly between execution areas in the nearby Falstad Forest and the small harbor at the village of Ekne in the vicinity of the camp. This activity was noticed by some prisoners of the Falstad camp and inhabitants of the local village. An old wooden fishing boat docked at the harbor was loaded with the 'cargo' from the lorries. The purpose of the operation was to exhume the bodies of camp victims buried in the Falstad Forest, transfer them to the harbor, put them on board the boat, and then make them disappear in the depths of Trondheim Fjord. Although the initial aim was to disinter the human remains of all prisoners executed and buried at the site, which at the time was estimated to be 300 people, only around 20-30 bodies were dug up and loaded onto the boat. It transpired that the operation was more difficult than anticipated and it was eventually called off on the evening of May 5.¹ The next night, on May 6, 1945, the vessel – laden with bodies and weighed down with stones – was ultimately allowed to sink in the fjord.

The search for the vessel, framed in the local narratives as a "corpse boat", was initiated immediately after the liberation of Norway on May 8, 1945. The efforts by the Norwegian Navy to locate the boat on the bed of the fjord and recover the remains of the victims of the camp ultimately proved futile. Similarly, a search carried out in 2007 by archaeologists and marine scientists from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, commissioned by the newly opened Falstad Center tasked with providing documentation and education about the history of the camp, did not

¹ For details on the operation, see Trond Risto Nielsen and Jon Reitan, *Falstad: Nazileir og landssvikfengsel*, Trondheim 2008.

produce the expected results.² The application of advanced technologies of deep-water archaeology, such as sonars and remote operated vehicles (ROV), did not help to locate the boat in the vast fjord. While the operation carried out in early May 1945 was on a smaller scale than the Germans had initially intended, it ultimately proved successful. The bodies loaded onto the vessel and sunk in the fjord effectively disappeared and will, perhaps, never be recovered. For those 20-30 people, there will be no reburial, no graves with assigned names and no relatives receiving repatriated remains. The violence exercised on them claimed them in their totality: not only their lives but also their bodily remains became subject to its reign.

The case of the Falstad boat serves as a telling example of the role dead bodies play in the ontology of political violence. The forms of disposal of victims' corpses – whether those of genocidal atrocities or political opponents – not only complement but also correspond to the 'logic' of exclusion which political violence instantiates and through which it operates. This starts with the production of political and/or social frameworks that lead to atrocities and legitimize mass killings based on the othering and exclusion of a specific group, either in terms of social/political belonging or from social geographical spaces. By placing people in detention centers or camps, where committing crimes is simpler from a logistical point of view, the violence (and those excluded) can, at least temporarily, be hidden from the view of society. This exclusion does not, however, cease after death. In most cases of state-sponsored violence, the dead bodies of victims are not returned to their families but 'confiscated' by the regime: they are buried in unmarked graves, disposed of in rivers or caves, cremated and mixed with the ashes of other victims.³

² See Marek E. Jasinski and Lars Stenvik, *Landscapes of Evil: Archaeology of Nazi POWs Camps in Norway. A New Approach*, in: Marianne Neerland Soleim (ed.), *Prisoners of War and Forced Labour: Histories of War and Occupation*, Newcastle Upon Tyne 2010.

³ For a discussion of practices of disposal of bodies in contexts as disparate as Nazi Holocaust, Srebrenica, and Argentina in 1970-1980s, see Élisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (eds.), *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*, Manchester 2017.

The main incentive behind the practice of the *confiscation bodies* is to erase all traces of the crime: the corpses offer the most compelling evidence that the crimes occurred. In her seminal work on the Soviet GULAG camps, Élisabeth Anstett argues, however, that the consequences of the *confiscation of bodies* are even more far-reaching. The practice itself comes to serve as a powerful means of terror: its objective is to keep society in a state of uncertainty resulting from the lack of information on the date of death, the causes and circumstances of deaths, and burial places.⁴ This affects, first and foremost, the relatives of the dead, yet it also has political and social ramifications. Deferred mourning puts the relatives of the dead in an emotional vacuum between psychological presence and physical absence, effectively preventing closure, while it also postpones the eventual rise of opposition. Moreover, by *confiscating* victims after their death, the perpetrators work towards their erasure from the realm of social memory, thus completing the victory.

In the European context, SS *Straffgefängelerlager Falstad* must be considered a rather minor camp and cannot by any means be compared to the most infamous Nazi concentration and extermination camps in terms of the number of prisoners and fatalities on its grounds. And yet it encapsulates the trajectory of violence described above, albeit on a smaller scale: from social/spatial exclusion to *confiscation* of human remains. Established in the fall of 1941 as a punishment prison camp for Norwegian political prisoners, foreign prisoners of war, and, in some periods, for Jews from central Norway, Falstad drew on the existing spatial infrastructure of exclusion. The main building of the camp was erected in 1921 as a special section for delinquent boys in an ordinary, state-run boarding school and was based on a model of traditional prisons and houses of correction. The prison-like design was the most probable reason for the Nazis to take over the building and further adopt

4 Élisabeth Anstett, *An Anthropological Approach to Human Remains from Gulags*, in: Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Élisabeth Anstett (eds.), *Human Remains and Mass Violence: Methodological Approaches*, Manchester 2014.

it for their purposes. From 1941 to 1945, altogether some 4300 to 5000 people of at least 16 different nationalities went through Falstad, many to be deported to other camps or executed in the nearby Falstad Forest.

Transformed into both an execution ground and a burial site for murdered inmates, the forest constituted the darkest element of the Falstad landscape. It was there that the prisoners were placed on the edge of a prepared grave and murdered by a gunshot to the neck or head from a pistol.⁵ Between 1942 and 1943, several mass executions were carried out at the site. On November 6, 1942, martial law was imposed by *Reichskommissar* Josef Treboven. The very next day, ten prominent inhabitants of Trondheim were taken by the Nazis as hostages and executed in retaliation for acts of sabotage carried out by the Norwegian resistance. The bodies of these ten victims have not yet been found. Another mass execution of Norwegians took place on October 8 and 9, 1942. Twenty-four men were executed in Falstad Forest after facing a military trial for their role in hiding weapons. They were buried in two mass graves located in two different burial fields of the Falstad Forest. During the operation of the camp, Soviet and Yugoslav Prisoners of War (POWs) and forced laborers were also executed in the forest. An account of an execution of Soviet POWs was given to British officers during their postwar interrogations of Josef Schlossmacher, a Gestapo official in Trondheim:

In the wood a grave had already been made ready. One of the Schutzpolizei then brought a prisoner to the grave side. [Walter Hollack [a Gestapo officer tasked with prosecuting political opponents] shot the prisoner in the neck with his pistol. He then fell dead to the ground and was laid in the grave. Hollack then gave orders to shoot the other Russians in the same way and they were all brought to the grave. I carried the order out with my 7.65 mm pistol.

5 This method of killing was recently confirmed by surface finds discovered during an archaeological survey carried out in 2018 within the framework of iC-ACCESS in collaboration with Kate Spradley from Texas State University.

Schlossmacher also recounted an execution of Yugoslav prisoners:

Four or five of us then fetched 13 Serbs out of the barracks and bound their hands behind their back. These were then put in a closed truck. Here they had to wait about an hour until Hollack and [Werner] Jeck [the camp commander] came out. They were both drunk. When they came to the graveside, Hollack ordered a Serb to be brought to him, whereupon Hollack shot him with his pistol [...] We then returned to Falstad Camp, were given a schnapps of vodka and drove on later to Trondheim.⁶

It is estimated that around 100 Soviet POWs, 74 Yugoslavian and 43 Norwegian political prisoners, and several Jewish men were killed and buried at the site.⁷ The task of digging the graves before planned executions was delegated to prisoners of the camp. Some of those requisitioned to prepare the graves survived the war, like the Serbian prisoner Ljuban Vukovic who later gave an account of his work. The operation of May 1945 was, therefore, a successful attempt to erase the presence both of the bodies and the graves – but also one countered by the memory of the former inmates and the material presence of buried remains, neither of which the Nazis managed to destroy.

It is largely thanks to Vukovic's testimony that, immediately after the liberation of the camp, Norwegian authorities were able to locate 40 of the graves hidden in the Falstad Forest.⁸ Directed by Vukovic, exhumation teams searched for and opened the graves, some of which, however, turned out to be empty a result of the actions associated with the "corpse boat". Most of this work was done by German soldiers and Norwegian

⁶ War Crimes Investigation Branch of the Allied Land Forces in Norway. Interrogation of Joseph Schlossmacher, 24.10. 1945. National Archives London, WO 331/21-90416.

⁷ Jon Reitan, *Face to Face* (exhibition catalogue), Falstad 2006, 47.

⁸ For a detailed account, see Arne Langaas, *The Graves of the Falstad Forest*, Falstad 2012.

collaborators now imprisoned in the camp,⁹ who were directed by Norwegian experts whose primary objective was finding and identifying the bodies of Norwegian victims; they succeeded in this endeavor for 28 individuals. Much less attention was given to the 60 bodies assumed to be of Eastern European victims, most of whom were disinterred in 1953 and cremated without any attempt at personal identification. All in all, between 1945 and 1953, when these state-run exhumations were put to a halt, 49 graves were opened and 88 bodies disinterred – a number far removed from the estimated, but still contested, number of between 220 and 300 victims of the camp. Many unidentified and unmarked graves might still exist in Falstad Forest.

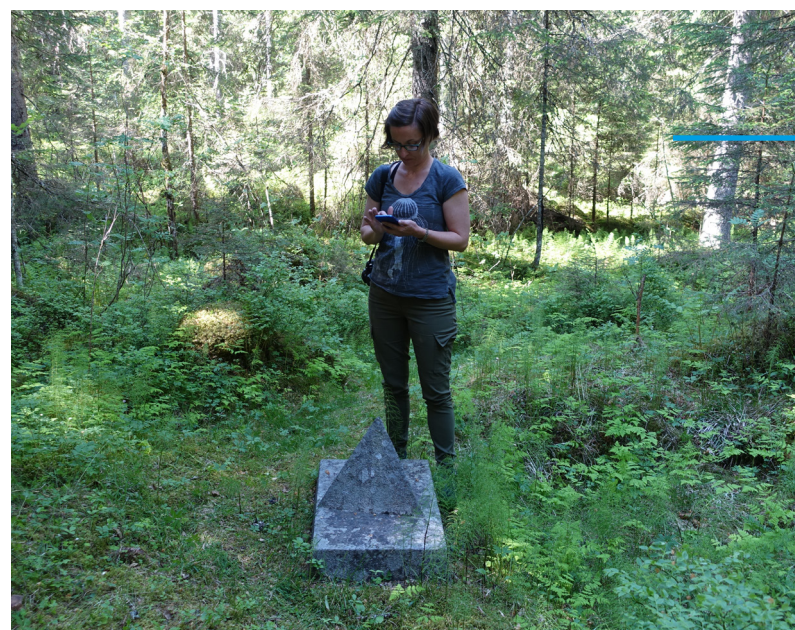
In the wake of the failed attempt in 2007 to localize and recover the boat sunken in Trondheim Fjord and, thus, the bodies of the anonymous victims of the Falstad camp, a broader archeological project devoted to the material legacy of the camp was launched by archaeologists from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). Between 2008 and 2011, geophysical surveys were carried out throughout the camp; these also focused on the Falstad Forest.¹⁰ The objective was to evaluate possible geophysical methods that could be used to detect unmarked and unknown mass graves. Nevertheless, as with the search for the boat,

⁹ Immediately after liberation in May 1945, the former SS Strafgefangenenlager Falstad was handed over to the Ministry of Justice's Department of High Treason. Under Norwegian administration, the Innherred Tvangsarbeidsleir was soon established, and functioned until 1949 as a forced labor camp for Norwegian Nazi collaborators and sympathizers convicted of treason. See Nilssen/Reitan, *Falstad*, 2008.

¹⁰ See for instance Marek Jasinski, *Memories of War and War on Memories: Painful Heritage of WWII in Norway. Archaeological Surveys 2007-2012*, in: Marek Jasinski and Leiv Sem (eds.), *Painful Heritage: Studies of Cultural Landscapes of the Second World War*, Trondheim 2015; Marek Jasinski and Lars Stenvik, *Landscape of Evil: Archaeology and Nazi POWs Camps in Norway: A New Approach*, in: Marianne Neerland Soleim (ed.), *Prisoners of War and Forced Labour: Histories of War and Occupation*, Newcastle 2010; Marek E. Jasinski, *Predicting the Past: Materiality of Nazi and Post-Nazi Camps. A Norwegian Perspective*, in: *International Journal in Historical Archaeology* 22 (2018) 3.

this research has not produced conclusive results: no new graves could be identified and opened. It is for this reason that a new, international project has been initiated in Falstad in 2018 within the framework of iC-ACCESS, based on collaboration with researchers from the Texas State University and the Polish Pomeranian Medical University. The *Falstad Archaeology and Forensic Sciences Program* benefits from the exchange and deployment of expertise in forensic anthropology, archaeology and forensic genetics. LIDAR surveys and other advanced geophysical methods are used to facilitate further searches for still hidden and unknown graves in the Falstad Forest and, hopefully, will lead to the recovery of confiscated bodies and their reinscription into the realm of social memory.

Marek E. Jasinski (NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology)
Andrzej Ossowski (Pomeranian Medical University, Poland)
Kate Spradley (Texas State University)



Kate Spradley
surveying graves in
Falstad Forest in
2018. Photo by
Marek E. Jasinski.



German prisoners exhuming graves in
the Falstad Forest after liberation of the
camp. Courtesy of the Falstad Center.



Monument in front of the main
execution area in the Falstad
Forest. Photo by Marek E.
Jasinski.



The Falstad Camp after the
liberation. Courtesy of the
Falstad Center.

HOLOCAUST VICTIMS, JEWISH LAW AND THE ETHICS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

04

The bodies of the victims of mass violence often exist within the boundaries or in the liminal spaces of campsites. This is particularly true of Holocaust-era camps where sites were either dedicated to mass extermination or where people died in large numbers as a result of how they were treated there. As photographs of places like Bergen-Belsen, Dachau and Ohrdruf emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War showing the dead bodies of the victims and with Holocaust memorialization practices placing ashes, hair, teeth and prosthetic body parts at the heart of their exhibitions, the foundations were laid for dead bodies to become entrenched in the iconography of the Holocaust.

However, despite these trends and the initial impetus to exhume the mass graves of Holocaust victims for either judicial or humanitarian reasons, searches and recovery operations for Holocaust victims have become something of a taboo subject.¹ This is perhaps evidenced by the fact that although there has been a significant increase in the number of archaeological and forensic investigations of Holocaust campsites and killing sites over the last four decades, dead bodies have either been absent from the foci of these projects or their investigation has been contested, often to such an extent that exhumation works have been forced to cease.² There are numerous such examples from all over Europe

1 Caroline Sturdy Colls, Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution, in: Journal of Conflict Archaeology 7 (2012) 2; Caroline Sturdy Colls, Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions, New York 2015.

2 For further discussion on this subject, see Caroline Sturdy Colls, 'Earth Conceal Not My Blood': Forensic and Archaeological Approaches to Locating the Remains of Holocaust Victims, in: Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Elisabeth Anstett (eds.), Human Remains in Society: Curation and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Genocide and Mass-Violence, Manchester 2016.

04

– perhaps most famously in Bełżec (Poland)³, Jedwabne (Poland)⁴ and Iași (Romania).⁵ However, the origins of such contestation are located many decades prior to these projects. In another article in this issue, Jean-Marc Dreyfus describes the evolution of mass grave investigations after the Second World War and highlights the example of exhumations at Bergen-Belsen in the 1950s, when disagreements between the national agencies undertaking exhumations and the Jewish community led to the cessation of all searches for Holocaust victims at this site.⁶

Ultimately, here – as in other places – disputes over dead bodies arose due to the conflicting nature of Halacha (Jewish law) governing Jewish burials and the pursuit of scientific, judicial or political aims. Halacha stipulates that graves of Jewish persons should not be disturbed, except in extreme cases where they come under threat (e.g. from man-made or natural landscape change). This rule – which centers on the belief that to disturb the grave of a person is to disturb their soul – is applied to graves created legally or illegally (as in cases of individual or mass violence such as the Holocaust).⁷ Scientific analyses of dead bodies – such as autopsies and DNA sampling – are also prohibited under Halacha. Conversely, civil legislation in many countries stipulates that victims of crimes should be recovered regardless of their religious denomination. This therefore creates tensions between governments, religious groups and individuals. This is not a problem unique to Jewish graves but one that persists

3 Andrzej Kola, Bełżec, The Nazi Camp for Jews in Light of Archaeological Sources, 1997-1999, Warsaw/Washington 2000, Bełżec.

4 Anthony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic (eds.), The Neighbours Respond: The Controversy Over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland, Princeton 2004.

5 Rupert Wolfe Murray, A Mass Grave Raises Ghosts of Romania's Holocaust Past, in: Time, 12 November 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2031066,00.html> (accessed on 12 December 2010).

6 See also Menachem Z. Rosensaft, The Mass-Graves of Bergen-Belsen: Focus For Confrontation, in: Jewish Social Studies 41 (1979) 2.

7 Michael Schudrich, Jewish Law and Exhumation, in: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Killing Sites: Research and Remembrance, Berlin 2014.

whenever exhumations are not wanted by religious, cultural or familial groups. The perceived sacred nature of Holocaust sites, particularly those which have remained undisturbed for decades, the fear of the deceased by some Roma and Sinti groups, and practical issues around the costs and logistics of exhuming large numbers of human remains may all be reasons why excavations may not be deemed desirable or necessary. Against these wishes, some nationalist governments have sought to reinvigorate searches for their citizens and claim ownership over the dead – often for political rather than humanitarian reasons. Contestation over the disturbance of Holocaust-era graves is therefore likely to intensify rather than diminish.

As I argued in my book *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions*, the apparent mismatch between religious law, archaeological practices (which often centre on excavation) and, sometimes, the wishes of survivors and family members of the deceased, has also rendered many sites 'off limits' to researchers and practitioners who seek to investigate Holocaust sites outside the remit of legal investigations. Having made this observation back in 2007, I developed a methodology that attempted to account for the ethical sensitivities surrounding the investigation of Holocaust-era graves whilst facilitating their thorough investigation. This approach has since been applied at a wide range of Holocaust sites and other places of mass violence across Europe, first as part of my doctoral studies and the Holocaust Landscapes Project, and now, most recently, as part of iC-ACCESS.

This methodology consists of the use of a suite of non-invasive methods drawn from archaeology, forensic investigation, digital humanities, history, geography engineering, computing, heritage studies and various other fields of study. Starting with desk-based assessment – which includes the examination of archival sources such as documents, photographs, maps and audio-visual materials – the work progresses to the collection and analysis of satellite and aerial imagery, the collection of airborne and

terrestrial remote sensing data, and geophysical surveys (to map below-ground remains). Drones, airborne and terrestrial laser scanners (LiDAR), GPS and other survey equipment, photogrammetry equipment, Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), resistance survey and other 3D visualization techniques provide the opportunity to map surface and below-ground traces that may indicate the presence of burials when multiple datasets are compared. All this can be achieved without disturbing the ground and thus in accordance with Jewish burial laws while also accounting for the concerns of others who may not wish exhumations to take place.



GPS (Global Positioning System) survey underway at Treblinka extermination camp which allows us to map subtle changes in topography caused by buried remains. Copyright @ Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University.

Since 2010, this approach has been applied successfully at the site of Treblinka extermination camp (Poland) where between 800,000 and one million victims (mostly Jews) were murdered during the Holocaust. The graves of these victims had largely gone uninvestigated up to this point since it was generally believed that excavation offered the only means of searching the area. Once the locations of the mass graves had been determined using non-invasive methods, excavations of selected parts of the remaining camp landscape (including the gas chambers and camp waste pit) were able to proceed in 2013 and 2017 without fear of disturbing human remains buried within graves.⁸ This approach also offered the possibility to protect the identified mass graves in the future. The Rabbinical, museum and conservation authorities all welcomed this approach as an ethical and responsible compromise between religious considerations and the undisputed need to further investigate the site. A variety of non-invasive methods have now also been used to examine a wide range of Holocaust landscapes. Some – such as the camps in Bergen-Belsen and Adampol, and killing sites across Poland and Ukraine⁹ – were found to contain unmarked graves. This approach therefore affords the same level of protection to these sites as at Treblinka.

Despite the successes of this methodology – both in terms of its ability to account for Halacha and to successfully identify the locations of dead bodies that have remained unidentified for decades – non-invasive research is not without its challenges and ethical issues. One of the

8 The archaeological investigations at Treblinka have been the subject of numerous publications including: Caroline Sturdy Colls and Kevin Colls, *The Heart of Terror: A Forensic and Archaeological Assessment of the Old Gas Chambers at Treblinka*, in: Pavel Vareka and James Symonds (eds.), *Dark Modernities*, Basingstoke 2018 (in press); Caroline Sturdy Colls and Michael Branthwaite, 'This is Proof'? Forensic Evidence and Ambiguous Material Culture at Treblinka Extermination Camp, in: *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 23 (2016); Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Gone But Not Forgotten: Archaeological Approaches to the Landscape of the Former Extermination Camp at Treblinka, Poland*, *Holocaust Studies and Materials* 3 (2014).

9 See for instance International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, *Killing Sites: Research and Remembrance*, Berlin 2014.

most prominent limitations of this approach is the fact that no method or combination of methods exist that could prove the existence of human remains to the same degree of certainty as excavation. Whilst it is possible to present a case for the existence of graves based on a wide range of evidence derived from these methods, only excavation can reveal the bodies themselves and facilitate their detailed examination. A key problem is that we may not know exactly who is buried in a grave until we excavate, but we may not be allowed to dig due to fears over who might be buried therein. In these situations, decisions regarding whether to excavate following non-invasive research may be particularly problematic when individuals from Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds are believed to be buried in the same grave or campscape, with lengthy discussions once again potentially ensuing if one group favors invasive work while another does not. Once prospective graves have been found, debates may be reignited or emerge about whether to excavate them, causing rifts between communities with different views on these issues. I have encountered cases where (Jewish) family members want graves to be excavated but Halacha, and thus Rabbinical authorities, say this cannot take place. Likewise, the extent to which Halacha is implemented at Holocaust sites can vary somewhat depending upon how orthodox a particular Rabbi or Jewish community may be. Hence, the ban on excavation has not been universally applied to Jewish burial sites around the world so it cannot always be assumed that non-invasive research will be the end of the process.¹⁰

Looting may occur once the locations of graves are publicly revealed via non-invasive means and there may be no guarantee of protection by local authorities when non-invasive evidence is presented. In my experience,

10 For varying examples, see Kola, Bełżec; Juliet Golden, *Remembering Chetmno: Heart-Wrenching Finds from a Nazi Death Camp*, in: *Archaeology* 56 (2003) 1; Yoram Haimi, *Archaeological Research in the Sobibór Camp: A Preliminary Report of the 2012 Excavation Season*, http://sobi-bor.info.pl/?page_id=354 (accessed on 12 May 2013).

non-invasive data is often easier to ignore by local authorities who may already lack the political will to engage with their Holocaust history or finance costly memorial projects. The results of non-invasive research might conversely spark panic amongst memorials, museum and other communities, particularly if the accepted narrative of a site is challenged by them.

Taking the decision to implement non-invasive methods in the first place also requires lengthy consideration, particularly at campsites where histories are highly contested. For example, the numbers war that is being waged between Croatia and Republika Srpska regarding the events that occurred in Jasenovac concentration camp means that examining the mass graves at the burial site Donja Gradina, even using non-invasive methods, would almost certainly result in the findings of any archaeological work being used in this debate.¹¹ As has already been observed, non-invasive geophysical methods can provide details regarding the dimensions of potential graves but not the number of bodies contained within them. Hence, this could give rise to archaeological data being misused to create speculative higher or lower mortality rates. Dead bodies, or their absence, have also been used as a central part of revisionist arguments in the decades following the Holocaust. Non-invasive research in particular is prone to getting drawn into these arguments. Writing about archaeological projects at campsites, some revisionists have claimed that these methods prove that no graves exist and that numbers of victims are lower than expected.¹² Others have even claimed that the stipulation of Halacha

11 Information regarding the numbers war between Jasenovac and Donja Gradina can be found in Rob van der Laarse, *Bones Never Lie? Unearthing Europe's Age of Terror in the Age of Memory*, in: Zuzanna Dziuban (ed.), *Mapping the 'Forensic Turn': Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, Vienna 2017; Andriana Benčić, *Jasenovac and the Persistence of the Past*, in: *Accessing Campsites* (2017) 2.

12 For just of the many examples, see <https://vimeo.com/261191612> and various discussion forums on <https://revblog.codoh.com/category/treblinka/>.

that excavation is not permitted is a 'big excuse' to disguise the fact that the Holocaust did not occur at all. Therefore, archaeological work can be misused and/or politicized for a range of reasons, often with the archaeologists carrying out the work having little control over the process. This is something that must be considered before the work is even carried out.

Aside from cases involving buried remains, it is also important to acknowledge that human remains may be encountered on the surface within campsites, sometimes during archaeological fieldwork or when the public visit sites. Likewise, they may be encountered scattered amongst other remains e.g. building rubble, when excavations of other camp features are permitted. In the case of scattered surface remains, they are likely to be deemed to be under threat and therefore their burial is likely to be preferred. The approach taken will likely vary depending upon whether or not remains have come to the surface as a result of looting or animal activity (thus they were originally buried in a grave) or whether they exist on the surface because they were never interred in a grave in the first place. If remains have been removed from a grave, many Rabbis would prefer that they remain in situ and thus they will likely request that they be recovered. If remains have never been buried in a grave, their collection and interment may be necessary. This may therefore apply to both scattered remains and those found during other excavations. These approaches require sensitive handling of the remains to ensure that religious laws are respected and that they can be adequately protected. A suitably qualified archaeologist should be used so that local and international standards on how remains are treated can also be followed. It should be noted that regarding the Jewish victims' remains, Rabbis are likely to request that prosthetic body parts, teeth, fillings and hair are treated in the same way as bones or soft tissue in terms of their handling and interment.

Dead bodies – and the graves in which they are interred – are often highly contested within Holocaust camps. This is not least of all due to the laws governing the treatment of Jewish burials and the various views that might exist with regards to whether excavation of remains is necessary or permitted. Whilst some see dead bodies in these environments as evidence of a crime, others view them as relatives, friends and loved ones who are in need of a proper burial or marked burial site. At some sites, camps are off limits, spaces to be avoided, which may conflict with desires to scientifically locate remains and/or reveal new information about the history of sites. Non-invasive methods, derived from archaeology and other disciplines, may offer one way of locating and classifying graves whilst respecting the ethical sensitivities involved in their investigation. Whilst these methods are not without their issues and challenges from a practical and ethical standpoint, they can allow sites to be examined in a way that avoids ground disturbance whilst successfully documenting new evidence relating to graves and their surrounding environment. This is a growing field of research and one which has proven ability and future potential to shed new light on the crimes perpetrated across the European Holocaust landscape.

Caroline Sturdy Colls (Staffordshire University)



GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) survey in the forests around the execution site at Treblinka labour camp at the site of possible unmarked mass graves. Copyright @ Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University.



Archaeological test pit excavation of a mass grave in Ukraine under strict Rabbinical supervision. GPR confirmed the presence of an anomaly, excavation confirmed the presence of a large grave. No human remains were removed or disturbed. Copyright @ Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University.

“JUNGLE LAW REIGNED AMONG THE PRISONERS”: THE MEANING OF CANNIBALISM IN THE TESTIMONIES OF NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS’ SURVIVORS

05

On March 31, 2016, the British press reported the discovery of “shocking new records” in the National Archives. A letter written by the “only British survivor of Belsen,” stated that “Nazi victims were reduced to ‘rampant cannibalism’” during the concentration camp’s final days.¹ The sense of revelation in these newspaper articles, however, cannot be explained by historical ignorance regarding cannibalism in Nazi camps. British and American newspapers had already reported in the immediate postwar years on such cases in Bergen-Belsen and other camps² while liberating troops mentioned it in interviews and written accounts of their experiences.³ Moreover, the existence of cannibalism across various fronts of the war is well-known to historians and has been documented specifically in relation to the Leningrad siege and the Nazi brutality

1 The letter was sent in the 1960s as part of a request for compensation. The headline of James Cox’s *The Sun* article was: *Nazi Victims Were Reduced to ‘Rampant Cannibalism’ in Belsen Concentration Camp, Shocking New Records Reveal*, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/1107727/nazi-victims-were-reduced-to-rampant-cannibalism-in-belsen-concentration-camp-shocking-new-records-reveal/> (14 March 2018).

2 See, for instance *Cannibalism in Prison Camp: British Medical Officer Visit to ‘Most Horrible Place’*, in: *The Guardian*, 19 April 1945, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1945/apr/19/secondworldwar.fromthearchive> (14 March 2018); *Cannibalism Cases in Belsen Related: Dresden Physician, a Prisoner and First German Witness, Tells of Slashed Bodies*, in: *New York Times*, 29 September 1945, 9.

3 Robert H. Abzug, *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps*, New York, 1985, 83; Ben Flanagan and Donald Bloxham, *Remembering Belsen: Eyewitnesses Record the Liberation*, London 2005; Mark Celinscak, *Distance from the Belsen Heap: Allied Forces and the Liberation of a Nazi Concentration Camp*, Toronto 2015, 60 and 67.

toward Soviet Prisoners of War (POWs).⁴ And yet, the journalists’ sense of discovery is not entirely unjustified, as no scholarly or popular work has so far examined in depth cannibalism during the Holocaust.

Rather than delving into the existing evidence on cannibalism during the Holocaust, scholars address it as an uncomfortable revelation. Some completely ignore the issue, question its very existence among Holocaust victims, or stress that it was an absolute rarity.⁵ More often, scholars who encounter evidence for cannibalism during the Holocaust, give only a very brief reference to this phenomenon when describing the dreadful conditions in the camps and ghettos. Such references usually take the form of a single sentence, stating that “some inmates became so desperate they resorted to cannibalism”⁶ or “there were even cases of cannibalism.”⁷ Formulations of this kind are rarely followed by either detailed descriptions or analysis. Therefore, by stopping after the mention of cannibalism, these scholars mark it as a limit phenomenon, a border that one does not cross.

Likewise, when cannibalism is mentioned in survivors’ testimonies, it is often used to indicate the most extreme expression of the Holocaust and simultaneously to articulate the impossibility of speech. Even though diaries written during the Holocaust and testimonies given after the

4 See, respectively, Antony Beevor, *The Second World War*, New York 2012; Richard Bidlack and Nikita Lomagin, *The Leningrad Blockade, 1941-1944: A New Documentary History from the Soviet Archives*, New Haven 2012, 314-323; Karsten Linne, *Hunger und Kannibalismus bei sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 58 (2010) 2, 243-262.

5 See, for instance Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, Princeton 1997, 162; Stanislaw Dobosiewicz, *Vernichtungslager Gusen*, Wien 2007, 239-240; Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, New Haven 2015, 4 and 103.

6 Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, New York 2015, 282.

7 Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System behind Them*, New York 2006 [1946]), 116.

event express their authors' wish to record the horrific details of their persecution, they also include certain silences, especially in relation to the repellent living conditions and aspects of one's behavior that may appear morally problematic or "distasteful."⁸ Michael Nutkiewicz recorded such a moment in an interview he made with a Holocaust survivor:

MN: Isn't testimony done to let the world know the full horror of what was done to people?

SB: I don't know. If I had been involved in cannibalism (which I did witness) I would not have talked about it on tape.

MN: Why not?

SB: It's inhuman. It's way beyond...⁹

Again, the survivor describes cannibalism as the most extreme occasion and as the point in which she must stop her narrative. Yet this brief reference also gives a clue as to the essence of this boundary. It views cannibalism as a fundamental transgression of what it means to be human.

A similar insight into this boundary also emerges when survivors express an interest in delving into their experiences of cannibalism but their audience proves incapable of hearing about it. Lawrence Langer introduces the case of a survivor who addressed cannibalism while recalling being in severe hunger, looking for "anything to eat." Following an Allied bombing in the area of Mauthausen concentration camp, a bomb fell on the camp itself. As can be reconstructed from other

⁸ See Susan L. Pentlin, Holocaust Victims of Privilege, in: Harry James Cargas (ed.), Problems Unique to the Holocaust, Lexington 1999, 25-42; Berel Lang, Oskar Rosenfeld and the Realism of Holocaust-History: On Sex, Shit, and Status, in: History and Theory 43 (2004), 278-288; Adam Brown, Beyond 'Good' and 'Evil': Breaking Down Binary Oppositions in Holocaust Representations of 'Privileged' Jews, in: History Compass 8 (2010) 5, 407-418.

⁹ Michael Nutkiewicz, Shame, Guilt, and Anguish in Holocaust Survivor Testimony, in: Oral History Review 30 (2003) 1, 21.

testimonies, too, the explosion led to the scattering of human body parts, which caused some of the starved inmates to feed upon them.¹⁰

MOSES S.: So we got up, and we found a hand from the bombing. [...] A human hand.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, a human hand.

MOSES S.: Five of us. Divided. And we were eating it. [...]

MOSES S.'S WIFE: Excuse me, I think we have to finish. Too much already.

MOSES S.: Human flesh.

Langer writes of the "general disquietude and consternation among the members of Moses S.'s audience" and calls this part of the testimony "a monologue that invites no dialogue."¹¹ In an attempt to explain the listeners' inability to engage with this information, Langer adds: "We lack terms of discourse for such human situations, preferring to call them inhuman and banish them from civilized consciousness."¹²

When Holocaust survivors refer to cannibalism in their testimonies, they do not merely describe what they have witnessed or heard of, but also ponder the boundaries of civilization and humanity. Such reflection is not restricted to the Holocaust. For centuries, Europeans have made references to cannibalism as narrative instruments for drawing the line between "civilized" and "uncivilized," and demonizing the Other.¹³ In so

¹⁰ See, for instance Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen (AMM), Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project (MSDP), OH/ZP1/52, Interview with Mordechai Eldar. Interviewer: Keren Harazi (23 April 2002). For the particularly severe conditions in the Mauthausen concentration camp during the war's final months, see Benjamin Eckstein, Mauthausen: Concentration and Annihilation Camp, Jerusalem 1984, 255-261 [in Hebrew].

¹¹ Lawrence L. Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, New Haven 1991, 117.

¹² Ibid., 118.

¹³ For this function of cannibalism see William Arens, The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology & Anthropophagy, Oxford 1979; Richard C. King, The (Mis)uses of Cannibalism in Contemporary Cultural Critique, in: Diacritics 30 (2000) 1, 106-123.

doing, they also produced an aesthetic of horror.¹⁴ The very mentioning of cannibalism awakens images and tales that arouse both disgust and fear – two elements that define what we call horror.¹⁵ I therefore argue that in attempting to express a sense of the radical dehumanization in the Nazi camps and convey its horror to their audience, some survivors' testimonies reconstruct the appalling reality of the camps as parallels to familiar stories set in remote, barbaric places fraught with atrocity and devoid of civilization.

"Jungle law reigned among the prisoners; at night you killed or were killed; by day cannibalism was rampant." It was this quote from the letter of a Bergen-Belsen survivor that stirred the British press, as outlined in this article's opening paragraph. Notably, the terror in this description is not associated with the cruelty of the SS and the author does not project the inhumanity onto the Nazi perpetrators. Moreover, this account does not describe starving inmates resorting to eating the flesh of the many corpses, who were strewn throughout the camp. Rather, it expresses grave fear of being attacked and killed to be eaten by one's fellow-prisoners. A similar fear was recorded during the Leningrad siege (1941-1943), as rumors that gangs of cannibals were roaming the city aroused widespread panic. Leningraders dreaded to leave their children unattended or walk alone in dark alleys, although NKVD reports indicate that only one such case took place.¹⁶ It seems, therefore, that the origin of this terror lies less in the actual prevalence of cases of cannibalistic murder and more in experiencing a state of utter chaos, when humans abandon social rules and values and instead follow primal, animalistic instincts.

14 Christian Moser, *Kannibalische Katharsis: Literarische und filmische Inszenierungen der Anthropophagie von James Cook bis Bret Easton Ellis*, Bielefeld 2005, 35.

15 See Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, New York 1990.

16 Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments*, Cambridge 2006, 238-242; Anna Reid, *Leningrad: Tragedy of a City Under Siege*, London 2012, 280-292.

A sense of chaos is apparent, especially in the testimonies of survivors who spent the war's final months in the camps that were liberated last. With the advance of the Red Army in late 1944 and the evacuation of the Auschwitz complex in January 1945, countless inmates were sent on death marches, trucks, or trains, to overcrowded concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau and Mauthausen, or to provisional camps that were constructed in a hurry.¹⁷ Numerous inmates died on the way, while those who reached their unknown destinations faced a reality that many describe as significantly more severe than the one they had known before. Although people nowadays have become accustomed to considering Auschwitz as the most dreadful place imaginable, many survivors – and especially those who had some privileged status that allowed them to maintain the hope of making it to the end of the war – depict leaving Auschwitz as a turn for the worse.¹⁸ This is evident, for instance, in an interview with Richard van Dam, a Dutch Jew, which was summarized as follows:

At the beginning of 1945 Mr. van Dam and a lot of co-prisoners were put aboard a ship (barge) and transported via the Donau [Danube] from Melk to Ebensee. This was the worst camp he had come to. Here chaos was complete. The prisoners [received] hardly any food at all. There was cannibalism.¹⁹

Cannibalism is thus used here to articulate and demonstrate the absolute anarchy in the camp and the worst conceivable conditions. In

17 Daniel Blatman, *The Death Marches: The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide*, Cambridge 2011; Stefan Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno: Das KZ-System im letzten Kriegsjahr*, Göttingen 2015.

18 See, for example, Jacques Stroumsa, *Violinist in Auschwitz: From Salonica to Jerusalem, 1913-1967* Konstanz 1996. On the references to this period as "the worst" see Kobi Kabalek, *Edges of History and Memory: The 'Final Stage' of the Holocaust*, in: *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 29 (2015) 3, 240-263.

19 Richard van Dam, *As Medical Orderly in Auschwitz* (received in January 1958). Yad Vashem Archive, Wiener Library Collection, O.2. File 637.

an interview given decades later, Jacob Maestro, a Jew from Salonika, described the deteriorating situation after leaving Auschwitz in a similar fashion:

We were transported from [Auschwitz to Mauthausen and then to Melk and from] Melk to Wels. In Wels there were hardly any barracks. It was in a forest. We walked freely [in the camp], without food, without anything. And there I heard that Ebensee is even worse. Ebensee is eating corpses. [long pause]²⁰

These accounts describe the incremental increases in distance to what their authors seem to conceive as civilization. This remoteness is expressed in terms of spatiality, as each subsequent camp is worse than the previous one and the distance from human settlements grows (“It was in a forest”), but also in relation to the lack of minimal conditions and provisions (no food rations, hardly any barracks). Here, even the routine that characterized the camps one knew before, which included roll-calls, harsh discipline, and slave labor, is missing (“We walked freely”). The occurrences of cannibalism in these places thus mark the greatest detachment from “civilization” and familiar social order. This depiction corresponds with an ancient view of cannibalism, which locates it, both geographically and symbolically, at the farthest point from civilized humanity, at the peripheries of the world.²¹ There, governed by a state of complete anarchy, where nature is untamed, the cannibal is prominent.²²

Cannibalism played a figurative role in many depictions that emerged during the Second World War. Writing in the Warsaw Ghetto, Emanuel Ringelblum defined regimes that rule by force and anarchy, and Hitlerism

²⁰ AMM MSDP OH/ZP1/299, Interview with Jacob Maestro. Interviewer: Keren Harazi (2002/2003).

²¹ Moser, *Kannibalische Katharsis*, 7-10.

²² Cătălin Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, Princeton 2009, 8-14.

in particular, as constituting “modern cannibalism”²³ while Soviet propaganda frequently labeled the Nazis as cannibals.²⁴ These images were embedded in a broader wartime discourse that presented the Second World War as a moral struggle that would decide the future of humanity. Thus, the Allies’ propaganda expressed a deep “fear that civilisation was now confronted by barbarism, order by chaos, good by evil”²⁵ and the same fear also appears in Jews’ ghetto diaries.²⁶ Cases of cannibalism were not very common and did not characterize the Nazi camps throughout the war years. But when cannibalism did transpire, it confronted inmates with a metaphor that became reality and thus with the absolute, most terrifying, proof that they had truly sank to barbarism.

Kobi Kabalek (Tel Aviv University)

²³ Emanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, Evanston 1974, 15.

²⁴ Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II*, Cambridge 2012, 127, 155, 175 and 181.

²⁵ Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, New York 1997, 357.

²⁶ Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust*, Ann Arbor 2006, 26-57.

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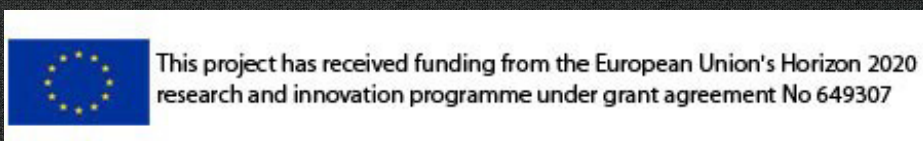
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