

# The application of forensic archaeological methods for Holocaust studies in Ukraine

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*To my beloved mother Tetiana Cherkaska and dearest mother-in-law Tetiana Kucherenko  
who both passed away during the course of my study*

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## **Abstract**

The examination of genocide sites, including those related to the Holocaust, is not a terra incognita in the 21st century. Forensic and archaeological investigations of mass graves and other sites connected to these events have developed significantly, particularly over the last 40 years. Forensic archaeology is widely accepted as this sub-discipline that can be defined as the application of archaeological theory and methods to the resolution of medico-legal and humanitarian issues.

However, these approaches are not commonly applied in Ukraine, and forensic archaeology is not considered a separate discipline. Likewise, in the past seven decades, archaeological investigations have not played an important role in Holocaust studies in Ukraine. Instead, research has had a tendency to focus on reviewing historical documents or oral history sources rather than physical evidence. Current Ukrainian legislation does not have guidelines for such expertise, and excavations of wartime burials are not done by professionals but by representatives of so-called search organisations (poshukovtsi). These are mostly volunteer organisations that focus on searching for and exhuming missing soldiers and their further identification in former Soviet countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. The absence of investigation reports and an adequate level of professional skills make this practice inappropriate for Holocaust sites. Therefore, this thesis aims: (1) to discuss the potential of forensic archaeological approaches for the identification and investigation of Holocaust sites in Ukraine, (2) to analyse Ukrainian legislation and current practice in order to understand why and how forensic archaeological methods are not used to widely employed for Holocaust sites (2) to demonstrate how archaeological and forensic archaeological data could enrich knowledge about the Holocaust of the East.

In many cases, there is only fragmented data available concerning the means of the killing of the Jewish population, Romas, Soviet Pows and many other groups during the Holocaust era and their burial places. The first attempts to investigate specific sites have only taken place in the past 70 years since these dramatic events. Often there was no commemoration of many

of these places in the post-war years, which means that the primary task of a researcher in most cases is to identify the specific location of killing and burial sites.

Furthermore, forensic archaeology is constantly developing, and this evolution has altered not only current practice but also its aims, objectives, scope, and definition. In order to understand these changes, the most common scenarios for applying archaeological approaches in Ukraine were discussed in this thesis. In addition, the benefits of more comprehensive applications of forensic archaeological methods are becoming more evident due to the ongoing war in Ukraine and the permanently increasing level of war crimes committed by Russians there.

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## Contents

### Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>FIGURES</b>	<b>XIII</b>
<b>PLATES</b>	<b>XVIII</b>
<b>TABLES</b>	<b>XX</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>XXI</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. INTRODUCTION STATEMENT	1
1.2. BASIS OF STUDY	9
1.3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES	12
1.4. THESIS STRUCTURE	15
<b>CHAPTER 2: CONSIDERATIONS AND STANDARDS FOR STUDY</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1. INTRODUCTION	18
2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF FIELD INVESTIGATION AT HOLOCAUST SITES AND GENOCIDE IN THE 20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY	20
2.2.1. EARLY INVESTIGATIONS	21
2.2.2. EARLY FIELDWORK CAMPAIGNS FOR MASS GRAVE AND HOLOCAUST SITES INVESTIGATIONS BY ARCHAEOLOGISTS	24
2.2.3. THE “FORENSIC TURN”	27
2.3. MASS GRAVE INVESTIGATION IN UKRAINE	34
2.3.1. FORENSIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN UKRAINE	34
2.3.2. OTHER APPROACHES TO HOLOCAUST SITES IN UKRAINE	38
2.4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD PROJECTS AND INVESTIGATIONS OF HOLOCAUST SITES IN UKRAINE	42
2.4.1. BUSK CASE STUDY: BACKGROUND	42
2.4.2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION	44
2.4.3. ANALYSIS OF FIELDWORK RESULTS	46
2.5. REFLECTION AND CHALLENGES IN A UKRAINIAN CONTEXT	52
2.5.1. PERCEPTION OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN UKRAINE	52
2.5.2. PERCEPTION OF HOLOCAUST SITES AND MASS GRAVES IN UKRAINE	54
2.6. FACTORS AFFECTING SEARCHES FOR HOLOCAUST VICTIMS	56
2.6.1. HIERARCHY OF VICTIMS	56

2.6.2. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN REMAINS EXAMINATION IN MODERN SCIENCE.	59
2.6.3. RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATION	60
<b>2.7. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>3. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>3.1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>64</b>
3.1.1. MASS GRAVE AND KILLING SITES: TERMS AND TYPES	64
<b>3.2. RESEARCH PROCEDURE</b>	<b>66</b>
3.2.1. DESK-BASED INVESTIGATION	67
<b>3.2. FIELDWORK DATA COLLECTION</b>	<b>79</b>
3.2.1. WALKOVER SURVEY	79
3.2.2. FORENSIC TAPHONOMY	80
3.2.3. TOPOGRAPHIC SURVEY	81
3.2.4. GEOPHYSICAL METHODS	85
3.2.5. DATA ANALYSIS	87
<b>3.3. METHOD AND SITE SELECTION</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>3.4. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>4. THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4.1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4.2. FORENSIC MEDICINE IN THE UKRAINIAN SSR</b>	<b>102</b>
4.2.1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF UKRAINIAN SOVIET FORENSIC MEDICINE IN THE 1920s- 1940s	102
4.2.2. SOVIET MILITARY FORENSIC MEDICINE SERVICE	108
4.2.3. PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF FORENSIC MEDICAL INVESTIGATION	110
<b>4.3. HISTORY OF THE CREATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>4.4. THE UKRAINIAN REPUBLICAN EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION</b>	<b>119</b>
4.4.1. EXPERTS AND PROCEDURES OF REGIONAL, DISTRICT AND TOWN EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSIONS	123
4.4.2. ACTS (COMMISSION REPORTS)	125
<b>4.5. UNCOVERING OF MASS GRAVES: THEORY AND PRACTICE</b>	<b>127</b>
4.5.1. EXHUMATION	127
4.5.2. MASS GRAVE LOCATION: RECORDING	128
4.5.2. THE PROCEDURE OF MASS GRAVE EXCAVATION	131
4.5.3. VICTIM IDENTIFICATION	133
4.5.4. CASE STUDY: THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION INVESTIGATION IN SOVKHOZ "KRASNYI"	134
<b>4.6. CRITICAL ANALYSIS</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>4.7. CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>5. THE HOLOCAUST IN SLAVUTA: JEWISH MASS GRAVES</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>5.1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>5.2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>5.3. THE NAZI OCCUPATION OF SLAVUTA AND EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY</b>	<b>148</b>
5.3.1. BACKGROUND	148
<b>5.4. THE SOVIET INVESTIGATION OF NAZI CRIMES IN SLAVUTA</b>	<b>155</b>

5.4.1. THE MASS GRAVES NEAR THE WATER TOWER	158
<b>5.5. THE RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK IN 2019</b>	<b>178</b>
5.5.1. AIMS, METHODOLOGY AND SITES CONDITIONS	178
5.5.2. RESULTS OF WALKOVER SURVEY	186
5.5.3. RESULTS OF GPR SURVEY	189
5.5.4. DISCUSSION	194
<b>5.6. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>6. THE HOLOCAUST IN SLAVUTA: THE POW CAMPS</b>	<b>198</b>
<hr/>	
<b>6.1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>198</b>
6.1.1. TREATMENT OF THE SOVIET PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMAN CAPTIVITY	200
6.1.2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CAMPS IN SLAVUTA	202
6.1.3. CAMP ADMINISTRATION AND PERSONNEL	206
<b>6.2. TOPOGRAPHY OF THE CAMP</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>6.3. KILLING AND BURIAL SITES</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>6.4. THE RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK IN 2019</b>	<b>228</b>
6.4.1. AIMS, METHODOLOGY AND SITES CONDITIONS	228
6.4.2. RESULTS	234
6.4.3. DISCUSSION	242
<b>6.5. PEOPLE IN THE CAMP</b>	<b>242</b>
6.5.1. CATEGORIES OF INMATES/CASUALTIES IN THE CAMP/RELATED TO THE CAMP	243
6.5.2. NUMBER OF DECEASED	250
<b>6.6. AFTERMATH</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>6.7. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION</b>	<b>263</b>
<hr/>	
<b>7.1. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS</b>	<b>263</b>
7.1.1. THE VALUE AND LIMITATIONS OF PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS	263
7.1.2. WELL-KNOWN SITES/UNKNOWN MASS GRAVES	267
7.1.3. DESTRUCTIVE VS NON-INVASIVE METHODS	269
<b>7.2. CONSIDERING THE UKRAINIAN CONTEXT</b>	<b>271</b>
7.2.1. FORENSIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE	271
7.2.2. CONTESTED NARRATIVES: NUMBERS AND NAMES	274
<b>7.3. PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INVESTIGATIONS</b>	<b>280</b>
<b>7.4. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>7.5. FINAL REMARKS</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>REFERENCED ARCHIVAL SOURCES</b>	<b>322</b>
<hr/>	
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>328</b>
<hr/>	
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>358</b>
<hr/>	



## Figures

FIG. 1.1. GERMAN ADMINISTRATION OF PRESENT-DAY UKRAINIAN TERRITORIES AND BORDERS OF AREAS UNDER NAZI ALLIES' OCCUPATION IN 1942, AFTER USHMM. 3

FIG. 1.2. SOVIET TERRITORIES UNDER OCCUPATION, DECEMBER 1941, AFTER ARAD. YI. 6

FIG. 1.3. SETTLEMENTS IN UKRAINE WHERE MORE THAN 500 JEWS WERE KILLED DURING WWII, AFTER PROTECTING MEMORY PROJECT. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THERE MIGHT BE ACTUALLY MORE THAN ONE GRAVE IN EACH SETTLEMENT, BUT THE SCALE OF THE MAP DOES NOT PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DEMONSTRATING EACH KNOWN MASS GRAVE. 8

FIG. 1.4. LOCATION OF SITES FOR CASE STUDIES (GOOGLE MAPS) 15

FIG. 2.1. A MAP OF JEWISH KILLING SITES AND MASS GRAVES IN UKRAINE, AFTER YAHAD-IN UNUM (2022). 40

FIG. 2.2. LOCATION OF THE JEWISH CEMETERY IN BUSK. (SATELITES.PRO).44

FIG. 2.3. PLAN OF AN EXCAVATION AREA WITH LABELLED PITS (BASE IMAGE YAHAD-IN-UNUM) ANNOTATED WITH ADDITIONAL BURIAL DATA (COPYRIGHT CENTRE OF ARCHAEOLOGY, STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY). 49

FIG. 3.1. VARIOUS MAPS AND PLANS FOR SLAVUTA. THIS IMAGE ILLUSTRATES THE DIVERSITY IN THESE TYPES OF SOURCES. MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW SLAVUTA MAPS WERE USED IN THIS RESEARCH WILL BE PROVIDED IN CHAPTERS 5 AND 6. 74

FIG 3.2. DATA COLLECTION WITH GNSS TECHNOLOGY (DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR) 84

FIG 3.3. THE PRINCIPLE OF GROUND PENETRATION RADAR (DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR) 86

FIG. 3.4. EXAMPLE OF PROCESSING OF TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY DATA FOR FORTHCOMING GEOPHYSICAL DATA ANALYSIS. RED SQUARES, (1) AND (3) REPRESENT THE AREA DEPICTED ON (4), YELLOW CIRCLES ON (4) CORRESPOND TO GNSS DATA; GREEN DOTS – TOTAL STATION DATA; GREEN SQUARE – GPR SURVEY GRID). (DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR). 88

FIG. 3.5. GPR DATA PROCESSING (DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR) 90

FIG.3.6. MAP OF PRESENT-DAY UKRAINE WITH TERRITORIES MARKED BY DIFFERENT ZONES OF OCCUPATION DURING WWII. RED DOTES MARKED THE CASE SITE LOCATION (UKRAINIAN CRISIS MEDIA CENTER) 93

FIG. 4.1. THE CIRCULATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION PAPERS. 99

FIG 4.2. ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS AND OTHER SOURCES WHERE COLLECTED THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION MATERIALS. 101

FIG. 4.3. SYSTEM OF FORENSIC MEDICAL SERVICE IN SOVIET UKRAINE. 105

FIG. 4.4. THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION (GENERAL) AIMS. 118

FIG. 4.5. SOME EXAMPLES OF MASS GRAVE LOCATION MAPPING:130

FIG.5.1. PALE OF SETTLEMENT ACCORDING TO MARTIN GILBERT. 142

FIG. 5.2. JEWISH POPULATION IN SLAVUTA DISTRICT ACCORDING TO 1926 CENSUS (JEWISH SETTLEMENTS MARKED AS GREY DOTS) AND POLISH-SOVIET BORDER BEFORE 1939 (BASED ON MAPA PROJECT: THE GREAT FAMINE IN UKRAINE 1932-34) (RED CIRCLE – SLAVUTA’S LOCATION). 146

FIG. 5.3. PLAN OF JEWISH HOLOCAUST SITES IN SLAVUTA, CREATED BY THE AUTHOR BASED ON EYEWITNESS TESTIMONIES AND SITE VISITS: 153

FIG. 5.4. MASS GRAVE LOCATION MARKED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION MEMBERS IN APRIL 1944 : (1) (2) (3) (5) MASS GRAVES OF THE POWS; (4) MASS GRAVES NEAR THE WATER TOWER; (6) POSSIBLE MASS GRAVES OF THE FIRST VICTIMS KILLED BY THE NAZIS IN 194; (6) AND (7) MASS GRAVES OF CIVILIANS (MOST LIKELY JEWS) IN THE FOREST. 157

FIG. 5.5. THE LOCATION OF MASS GRAVES IDENTIFIED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION ON 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1944. ORIGINAL PLAN YVA 7021-64-1, P. 88 160

FIG 5.6. SKETCHES DRAWN BY THE AUTHORS VISUALISING THE EXCAVATED GRAVES BASED ON THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION REPORT.163

FIG. 5.7. THE LOCATION OF MASS GRAVES AND THE POW CEMETERIES, DRAWN BY THE MEMBERS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION ON 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1944 (OBJECT 2 AND OBJECT 3 – MASS GRAVES OF POWS IDENTIFIED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION MEMBERS. OBJECT 4 – MASS GRAVES NEAR THE WATER TOWER. 180

FIG. 5.8. THE COLOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE RADIO SPECTRUM APPLIED FOR THE SURVEY ON GRID 2B. 182

FIG. 5. 9. DIELECTRIC VALUES FOR COMMON MATERIALS FOR GSSI 3000 ANTENNA. 183

FIG. 5.10. THE POSSIBLE POSITION AND PROPORTION OF FEATURE DURING THE SCANNING OF FLAT AREA (A) AND CURVE AREA (B): RADIO WAVES (YELLOW ARROWS); ORIGINAL FEATURE BENEATH THE SURFACE (1); ORIGINAL FEATURE ON THE 2D PROFILE (2). 184

FIG. 5.11. VERTICAL PROFILE DATA FROM GPR SURVEY LINE PLY5 (TOP), REPEATED WITH ANNOTATION FOR BURIED MOUNDS 1 AND 2 (MIDDLE) AND THE SITE LOCATION OF PLY5 (BOTTOM) FROM PLYSKIV, UKRAINE (COURTESY OF THE CENTRE OF ARCHAEOLOGY) THE COA, (2016) P. 21. 186

FIG.5.12. LOCATION OF GRID 2B (BLUE SQUARE) AND TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES COLLECTED BY LEICA ZENO WITH MOUNDS (RED DOTS); DEBRIS PIT (BLACK DOTS); VEGETATION CHANGES (GREEN DOTS).

187

FIG. 5.13. THE TIME-SLICE GPR DATA FOR GRID 2B AREA AT DEPTH 0 M (A) AND 1,15 M (B) WITH INTERPRETATIONS: A GRASSED AREA INCONSISTENT WITH ITS SURROUNDINGS(1), DEBRIS PIT (2) A MOTOTRACK (3) THE AREA WITH MOUNDS (4). 190

FIG. 5.14. VERTICAL PROFILE DATA FROM GPR SURVEY LINE GRID 2B L006 (B), REPEATED WITH ANNOTATION FOR MOUNDS (RED ARROWS MARKED TOPS OF THE MOUNDS) (C) AND THE PROFILE LOCATION ON THE TIME SLICE (A). 191

FIG. 5.15. TIME SLICE OF DEBRIS PIT / FEATURE A (MARKED BY BLACK DOTS) AND POSSIBLE MASS GRAVE/FEATURE B (MARKED BY A GREY RECTANGLE) AT DEPTHS OF 0 M (A), 0.28 M (B), 0.7 M (C).

192

FIG. 5.16. GPR VERTICAL DATA PROFILES FOR SURVEY LINES 037, 038, 039, 040, 041 (GRID 2B) (LEFT COLUMN) AND THE ANNOTATED VERSION OF THE PROFILES LINES: (A) FEATURE BENEATH THE SURFACE RELATED TO DEBRIS PIT; (A1 – A2) BOUNDARIES OF DEBRIS PIT; (B) FEATURE BENEATH A GRASSED AREA INCONSISTENT WITH ITS SURROUNDINGS (POSSIBLE MASS GRAVE); (B1 – B2) VISIBLE BOUNDARIES OF THE GRASSED AREA; (C)– POSSIBLE MAXIMUM DEPTH TO FEATURE B OR ECHO EFFECTS. 193

FIG. 5.17. GPR VERTICAL DATA PROFILES FROM (A) CHUKIV (COURTESY OF THE CENTRE OF ARCHAEOLOGY); (B) ROHATYN (COURTESY OF ROHATYN JEWISH HERITAGE); (C) BRYUKHOVYCHI (COURTESY OF GEOSCOPE). 195

FIG. 5.18. THE LOCATION OF THE GPR INVESTIGATING AREA (RED QUADRILATERAL) AND THE APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF THE MASS GRAVES THAT WERE RECORDED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION IN 1944 (GREEN CIRCLE). 196

FIG. 6.1. THE LOCATION OF SLAVUTA (VIOLET DOT) ON THE GERMAN MAP OF SOVIET RAILWAYS AND HIGHWAYS, 1941. 205

FIG. 6.2. THE CAMPSCAPE IN SLAVUTA TODAY OVERLAYED ON A GOOGLE EARTH IMAGE (BARRACKS NUMBER (I-X) ACCORDING TO GERMAN AND SOVIET SOURCES): (1) JEWISH MASS GRAVES NEAR THE WATER TOWER; (2) LOCATION OF COMMEMORATED PART OF POW CEMETERY; (A) LOCATION OF GERMAN ADMINISTRATION, PATROL AND MILITARY BUILDINGS; (B) POW BARRACKS LOCATION (REMAIN, BUT ABANDONED OR USED AS A DORMITORY); (C) POW BARRACKS LOCATION (DEMOLISHED). 211



FIG. 6.3. PLAN OF THE POW CAMP IN SLAVUTA IN 1944 (SCALE 1: 10,000): SLAVUTA IN THE UNTOLD STORIES (WEB PAGE). 213

FIG. 6.4. A SHED FOR CADAVERS, DRAWING BY FORMER POW ALEKSEI PANKIN: YVA M.33/ F. 7021/ OP. 64/ S.799, P. 52.215

FIG. 6. 5. PLAN OF LOCATIONS FOR OBJECT 1, OBJECT 2 AND OBJECT 3 DRAWN BY THE MEMBERS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION IN APRIL 1944 (LEFT - AUTHOR UNKNOWN, RIGHT – AUTHOR TECHNICIAN KRAVCHENKO). I – BARRACK 1, II – BARRACK 2. . 216

FIG. 6.6. PLAN OF BURIAL SITE LOCATION CREATED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION IN APRIL 1944: (1) THE MAIN POW CEMETERY; (2) AND (3) MASS GRAVES NEAR BARRACK 1; (4) JEWISH MASS GRAVES NEAR THE WATER TOWER; (5) BURIAL SITES NEAR THE HOSPITAL BARRACK; (6) POSSIBLY THE MASS GRAVES OF THE FIRST JEWISH VICTIMS OF THE NAZIS IN SLAVUTA. 217

FIG. 6.7. LOCATION OF OBJECTS 2 AND 3 (THE SECOND CAMP CEMETERY) (YELLOW LINE) OVERLAYED ON GOOGLE EARTH MAP. 219

FIG. 6.9. A CADAVER WITH A SPLINT ON HIS LEFT LEG (EXHUMED FROM A GRAVE AT OBJECT 1), APRIL 1944. 227

FIG. 6.10. THE BIRD'S VIEW OF THE SURVEYED AREA: (A) THE REMAINS OF BARRACK 1; (B) THE WHITE SUB-RECTANGULAR GRID 1 LOCATION (GRID EDGES COLLECTED BY LEICA ZENO); (C) THE MAIN CAMP CEMETERY (OBJECT 1) AND CONTEMPORARY MEMORIAL. 230

FIG. 6.11. THE COLOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE RADIO SPECTRUM APPLIED FOR THE SURVEY ON GRID 1. 231

FIG. 6.12. THE GPR GRID LOCATION OVERLAYED ON THE GOOGLE EARTH MAP WITH LEICA ZENO DATA (ORANGE DATA POINTS MARKED VARIOUS TOPOGRAPHICAL OBJECTS, E.G. FENCE, ELECTRICITY LINE, CORNERS OF THE SURVEY GRID, FOR CREATING A DIGITAL PLAN OF THE SITE) AND THE REMAINS OF BARRACK 1 (BLACK ARROW). 232

FIG. 6.13. THE TIME-SLICE GPR DATA FOR GRID 1 AT A DEPTH OF 0 M, 0.25 M, 0.55 M, AND 0.8 M REPEATED WITH INTERPRETATIONS (BELOW): (A) POSSIBLE MASS GRAVE (B) AND (C) AREAS WITH POSSIBLE MASS AND INDIVIDUAL BURIALS; (D) POSSIBLY A WATER PIPE; (E) TRACKS; (F) VOID DATA 233

FIG 6.14. SECTION PROFILE RESULTS FROM SURVEY LINES 0 M, 1M AND 3 M (TOP) WITH ANNOTATION (BOTTOM). A PROFILE OF ANOMALY (POSSIBLE MASS GRAVE, FEATURE A) IS VISIBLE IN THE SECTION (GREY) WITH STRONG REFLECTION. THE DEPTH SCALE IS ON THE LEFT-HAND SIDE OF EACH IMAGE. 235

FIG. 6.15. SECTION PROFILE RESULTS FROM SURVEY AXIS LINES 13.5 M AND 14 M (TOP) WITH ANNOTATION (BOTTOM). A PROFILE OF ANOMALY (POSSIBLE PIT) (FEATURE B) IS VISIBLE IN THE SECTION (GREY) WITH STRONG REFLECTION. THE DEPTH SCALE IS ON THE LEFT-HAND SIDE OF EACH IMAGE. 237

FIG. 6.16. SECTION PROFILE RESULTS FROM SURVEY AXIS LINES 5 M, 9.5M AND 21 M (TOP) WITH ANNOTATION (BOTTOM). A PROFILE OF ANOMALY (POSSIBLE A WATER PIPE, FEATURE D) IS VISIBLE IN THE SECTION (GREY) WITH STRONG REFLECTION. THE DEPTH SCALE IS ON THE LEFT-HAND SIDE OF EACH IMAGE. 239

FIG. 6.17. SECTION PROFILE RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY LINE 6.5 M (LEFT) WITH ANNOTATION (RIGHT). A PROFILE OF THE SHALLOW ANOMALY (POSSIBLE TRACK, FEATURES E) AT A DEPTH OF 0.4 M. 241

FIG. 6.18. THE DOCUMENT ABOUT LIBERATION NADEZHDA MOLCHANOVA FROM STALAG 301. 247

FIG. 6.19. FUNERAL PEOPLE TRANSFERRING DEAD BODIES FROM THE CAMP TO THE POW CEMETERY (OBJECT 1): DRAWINGS OF FORMER POWS PANKIN (LEFT) AND SERGEI VALIAIEV (RIGHT). 254

FIG. 6.20. THE ARRIVAL OF THE POWS IN SLAVUTA, DRAWING BY FORMER SLAVUTA INMATE PANKIN. 255

## Plates

<b><u>PLATE 1.1. LOCATION OF KILLING SITES IN MASS GRAVES IN: 1. BABYN YAR (KYIV); 2. VINNYTSIA; 3. FORMER KOLHOZ 'SERP I MOLOT' (BORYSPIL); SAMGORODOK (VINNYTSIA REGION). AUTHOR'S OWN PHOTOS.</u></b>	<b>10</b>
<b><u>PLATE 2.1. FIELDWORK IN BUSK, AUGUST 2006. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF YAHAD-IN UNUM.</u></b>	<b>50</b>
<b><u>PLATE 4.1. GERMAN INVESTIGATION IN VINNITSIA (AMTLICHES MATERIAL ZUM MASSENMORD VON WINNIZA (1944)).</u></b>	<b>96</b>
<b><u>PLATE 4.2. BURDENKO (ON THE LEFT) DURING THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION INVESTIGATION IN OREL</u></b>	<b>116</b>
<b><u>PLATE 4.3. EXAMPLES OF A MASS GRAVE EXCAVATION: LEFT – THE EXCAVATION OF A MASS GRAVE IN A FORMER ANTI-TANK DITCH IN SOKAL, LVIV REGION.; RIGHT - EXCAVATION OF MASS GRAVE IN BRAILOV, VINNYTSIA REGION..</u></b>	<b>132</b>
<b><u>PLATE 4.4. IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS: LEFT - IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS IN SOKAL LVIV REGION.; RIGHT - IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS OF STALAG IN SLAVUTA</u></b>	<b>134</b>
<b><u>PLATE 5.1. MONUMENTS AT THE TERRITORY OF THE GHETTO (AUTHOR'S OWN PHOTOS. 15/08/2020)</u></b>	<b>152</b>
<b><u>PLATE 5.2. THE WATER TOWER AND THE NEAREST BARRACK (POINT FROM WHERE EYEWITNESS GEI WATCHED THE EXECUTION, BLUE ARROW); PINK DASH-DOT LINE – MASS GRAVE LOCATION, IN THE FOREGROUND – GRAVES AT THE POW CAMP CEMETERY</u></b>	<b>154</b>
<b><u>PLATE 5.3. THE GENERAL AREA CONTAINING THE MASS GRAVE NEAR THE WATER TOWER TODAY (AUTHOR'S OWN PHOTOS. 16/05/2019)</u></b>	<b>159</b>
<b><u>PLATE.5.4. MOUNDS LOCATED ON THE SLOPE CLOSE TO THE WATER TOWER (15/08/2020)</u></b>	<b>181</b>
<b><u>PLATE. 5.5. THE MOTORTRACK (MARKED RED)</u></b>	<b>184</b>
<b><u>PLATE. 5.6. CONDITION OF GPR INVESTIGATION AREA WITH SEVERAL GRASS-COVERED MOUNDS, MAY 2019.</u></b>	<b>189</b>
<b><u>PLATE 6.1. THE REMAINS OF THE FORMER POW CAMP (BARRACKS 7 AND 9) IN SLAVUTA IN OCTOBER 2018. AUTHOR'S OWN PHOTO.</u></b>	<b>199</b>

<u>PLATE 6.2. THE MEMBERS OF THE 20TH BORDER PATROL SQUAD OF THE NKVD IN SLAVUTA, THE 1 MAY 1936. ABURACHMAN BURCHANOV – A GUNSMITH OF THE BORDER PATROL IN SLAVUTA, WORKED IN THE PENAL SYSTEM BY 1941 (ORANGE CIRCLE).</u>	<u>203</u>
<u>PLATE 6.3. VIEWS OF THE STALAG IN SLAVUTA IN 1944</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>PLATE 6.4. THE PUNISHMENT CELLS IN ONE OF THE BARRACKS, 1944</u>	<u>214</u>
<u>PLATE. 6. 5. REMAINS OF 45 PRISONERS OF GROSSLAZARETT WERE FOUND IN THE CELLAR OF BARRACK II IN JANUARY 1944.</u>	<u>215</u>
<u>PLATE 6.6. VIEW OF OBJECT 2 AND BARRACKS I, II, III IN APRIL 1944.</u>	<u>220</u>
<u>PLATE 6.7. EASTERN PART OF OBJECT 1, APRIL 1944.</u>	<u>227</u>
<u>PLATE 6.8. A CADAVER WITH A SPLINT ON HIS LEFT LEG (EXHUMED FROM A GRAVE AT OBJECT 1), APRIL 1944.</u>	<u>227</u>
<u>PLATE 6.9. THE MAIN CAMP CEMETERY (OBJECT 1) IN MAY 2019.</u>	<u>228</u>
<u>PLATE. 6.10. THE GENERAL VIEW OF THE SURVEYED AREA.</u>	<u>229</u>
<u>PLATE 6.11. PROCESS OF IDENTIFICATION AT THE CAMP CEMETERY (OBJECT 1) IN APRIL 1944.. IT IS HARD TO SAY WHO THOSE TWO WOMEN ON THE PLATE WERE. THEY MIGHT BE RELATIVES OF DECEASED PERSONS OR, MOST LIKELY, THEY WERE PONIATYE (WITNESSES) DURING THE PROCEDURE OF THE EXHUMATIONS OF CADAVERS</u>	<u>250</u>
<u>PLATE 6.12. MISSING WINDOW GLASS IN ONE OF THE BARRACKS IN SLAVUTA, JANUARY 1944</u>	<u>252</u>
<u>PLATE 6.13. FORMER INMATES OF THE SLAVUTA CAMP DIED AT THE HOSPITAL, 1944</u>	<u>256</u>
<u>PLATE. 6.14. VLADIMIR LOBANOV (YOB 192 (3)4), A FORMER INMATE OF THE SLAVUTA POW CAMP, DIED ON THE WAY TO HOSPITAL 2197 IN BARANIVKA (ABOUT 160 KM FROM SLAVUTA); HE HAD BEEN IN SLAVUTA SINCE OCTOBER 1943.</u>	<u>257</u>
<u>PLATE. 6.15. THE FIRST MONUMENT WAS ERECTED AT THE POW CEMETERY</u>	<u>261</u>

## Tables

**TABLE 2.1. MEASUREMENTS AND A POSSIBLE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PIT, EXCAVATED DURING THE FIELDWORK IN BUSK IN 2006**      **48**

**TABLE. 3.1. TYPOLOGY OF THE MASS GRAVE**      **66**

**TABLE 3.2. A SHORTLIST OF COLLECTIONS, INCLUDING THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS FOR THIS RESEARCH****71**

**TABLE. 4.1. A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF MEDICO-LEGAL ASPECTS IN THE 1930S-1950S**      **113**

**TABLE 4.2. MEMBERS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION (GENERAL**      **115**

**TABLE 4.3. MEMBERS OF THE UKRAINIAN EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION**      **120**

**TABLE 5.3. MOUNDS MEASUREMENTS DESCRIBED IN THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSION REPORT**  
**188**

**TABLE 6.1. MEASUREMENTS OF THE MASS GRAVES AT OBJECT 2 AND INFORMATION ON HOW MANY HUMAN REMAINS WERE TAKEN FOR MEDICAL EXAMINATION FROM THERE.**      **221**

## List of Abbreviations

2D	Two-dimensional
3D	Three-dimensional
CAD	Computer-aided design
ClfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
CoT	Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University
DaKhm	The State Archive of Khmelnytskyi region
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
Dulag	Durchgangslager (PoW transit camp)
f.	archival collection
GDA SBU	The State Archives. Department of the Security Service of Ukraine
GIS	Geographic Information System
GNSS	Global Navigation Satellite System
GPR	Ground-penetrating Radar
GPS	Global Positioning System
GULAG	The Chief Administration of the Camps
iC-ACCESS	Accessing Campscapes: Inclusive Strategies for Using European Conflicted Heritage
ICOM	International Council of Museums
IPN	Polish Institut Pamięci Narodowej Institute of National Remembrance
IRT	thermography
KGB	Security service in the former Soviet Union
LiDAR	Light Detection and Ranging
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
OBD	Memorial online database Memorial
Oflag	Offizierslager (Officers PoW camp)
OGPU	Joint State Political Directorate
op.	inventory of an archival collection
OUN	the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists
PoW	Prisoner of War

Red Army The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army  
 RGAKFD The Russian Federation State Video – Photo – Phono Archive  
 Russian SFSR Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic  
 s. case in archival collection  
 SS Schutzstaffel (Protection Squadron)  
 Stalag Stammlager (PoW camp)  
 The Extraordinary Commission the Extraordinary State Commission for the  
 Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the Fascist German Invaders and their  
 Accomplices, and of the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public  
 Organisations, State Enterprises, and Institutions of the USSR  
 the Mission Mission de Recherche des victimes de la Guerre (Mission for the  
 Search for Victims of the War)  
 TsDAGO The Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine  
 TsDAKFFD The Central State Video – Photo – Phono Archive  
 TsDAVO The Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of  
 Ukraine  
 UK United Kingdom  
 Ukrainian SSR Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic  
 UPA Ukrainian Resistance Army  
 USA United States of America  
 USHMM United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
 USSR the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics  
 WAC World Archaeological Congress  
 WWII World War II  
 YIUA Yahad-In Unum Archive  
 YoB year of birth  
 YVA Yad Vashem Archive

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Introduction statement

The history of the Holocaust is rightfully considered one of the most current, interdisciplinary, and multi-vector themes in modern humanitarian science.<sup>1</sup> However, there are numerous unanswered questions still outstanding. The territory of present Ukraine is a crucial area for Holocaust studies, and not only in the context of Eastern Europe. Ukrainian soil, which has been the historic home of Jews since the Middle Ages, witnessed unprecedented forms of eradication in the build-up and during World War II. Browning argued that this was the place where the Holocaust began.<sup>2</sup>

Traditional perspectives of Holocaust studies have focused on the investigation of several types of camps and subcamps (extermination, concentration, Prisoners of War (PoW), forced labour, transit). Current research has documented over 40,000 camps and subcamps, mostly

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<sup>1</sup>NB: According to specifics of sources (a lot of archival collections) involved in this research it was decided to use Harvard system in footnotes. Full bibliography available in pp. 287-321.

NB: This research adopts the following definition of the Holocaust: The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived racial and biological inferiority: Roma (Gypsies), people with disabilities, and some of the Slavic nations (Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioural grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals: *Introduction to the Holocaust*. Available at: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust> (Accessed: 15 December 2022); *The United Nation Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on the Holocaust Remembrance* (2005). Available at: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/60/7> (Accessed: 15 December 2022). However, some scholars focused only on a narrow understanding of Holocaust as genocide against Jewish people (such as Dawidowicz, L. (1975) *The War Against the Jews*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, pp. XXXVII- XXXVIII; Bauer, Ye. (2007) *On the Holocaust and Other Genocides*. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, pp. 3-4.; Snyder, T. (2011) *Kryvavi zemli: Evropa mizh Hitlerom ta Stalinym*. Kyiv: Grani-T, p.412.) and opposite point of view represented in such research as Charny, I. (1994) 'Toward a generic definition of genocide', in G. Andreopoulos (ed.), *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 78; Porter, J. (1999) 'Holocaust controversies: a point of view', in *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, Vol. 1, pp. 307-308; Rozet, R. and Spector, Sh. (eds.) (2000) *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd, pp. VI-VII; Huttenbach, H. (1998) 'Comparative Genocide Studies and the Future Directions of Holocaust Research', *The Reference Librarian*, Volume 29, No. 61-62, pp.89-90; Kuper, L. (1981) *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.48-49.

<sup>2</sup> Browning, C. (1992) *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Browning, C. (2004) *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942 (with contributions by Matthaus, Ju.)*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.



in Central Europe and Western Europe, but the number of studies increases every year.<sup>3</sup> However, an examination of the fates of Eastern European and Soviet Jews shows that the Holocaust took place not only at the camps outside the present territory of Ukraine but also in thousands of small villages, towns and even in big cities.<sup>4</sup> Due to the scale and the methods of genocide in this region, a particular term for the Holocaust in Eastern Europe has been created – the Holocaust by bullets.<sup>5</sup> This term describes the procedure of extermination in that region accurately since the majority of victims were shot close to their settlements in thousands of mass graves.

Killings took place across all five zones created in Ukraine during the Nazi and Allied occupation, and the Holocaust occurred in significantly distinct ways for each of them.<sup>6</sup> These zones (presented on Fig. 1.1.) were:

- 1 - the Reichskommissariat Ukraine,
- 2 - the General Gouvernement,
- 3 - the Governorate Transnistria (zones under Romanian occupation),
- 4 - the Military Administration Zone,
- 5 - the Ruthenia/Transcarpathia (Pidkarpats'ka Ukraina or present Zakarpattia region).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, (2018) Volume. 3, Camps and Ghettos under European Regimes Aligned with Nazi Germany. .

<sup>4</sup> Dubyk, M. and Papakin, G. (ed.) (2000) *Dovidnyk pro tabory, tiurny ta getto na okupovanii terytorii Ukrainy (1941-1944)*. Kyiv: Derzhavnyi komitet arhiviv Ukrainy, Ukrain's'kyi national'nyi fond „Vzayemorozuminnia ta pryvnyrennia”; Kruglov, A., Umansky, A. and Shchupak, I. (2016) *Kholokost v Ukraine. Reikhskoissariar “Ukraina”. Gubernatorstvo “Transnistria”*. Dnipro: Ukrainskii institute izucheniya Kholokosta “Tkuma” and Lira LTD; Al'tman, I. (ed.) (2009). *Kholokost na territorii SSSR. Entsyklopedia*. Moscow: Rossiyskaya Politicheskaya Entsyklopedia, Nauchno-prosvetitel'skii tsentr “Kholokost”.

NB: A lot of Russian and Ukrainian language sources were cited during the completion of this project. All Cyrillic publication and source titles were transliterated to Latin by the author for simplification of search.

<sup>5</sup> Desbois, P. (2008). *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*. Hampshire.

<sup>6</sup> NB: Here means traditional military coalition known as the Axis powers, which included Third Reich, Kingdom of Italy, Empire of Japan, Kingdom of Romania, Kingdom of Hungary, Slovak Republic, Kingdom of Bulgaria, Independent State of Croatia, republic of Finland and Kingdom of Thailand.

<sup>7</sup> NB: most names of cities in Ukraine were rendered according to Ukrainian writing even though some names commonly used in Russian, or Polish are written differently, such as: Kyiv instead of Kiev, Lviv instead of Lwów. There were some exceptions in cases when the author has used other sources, for example maps from other publications.

The names of German administrations are provided in original German transcription.



Fig. 1.1. German administration of present-day Ukrainian territories and borders of areas under Nazi allies' occupation in 1942, after USHMM.<sup>8</sup>

It was Jews from **the Ruthenia/Transcarpathia region** (specifically Transcarpathia) that became the first victims of the Holocaust by bullets in the massacre in Kamianets'-Podil'ski in August 1941.<sup>9</sup> C. 14,000 Jews were deported from this region and c. 10,000 local ones were shot there. This event was the turning point from individual killings to mass extermination of Jewish communities by the Nazi occupiers. However, the details of these events are not widely known. Traditionally, the zone Ruthenia/Transcarpathia zone is researched in the context of

<sup>8</sup> *German administration of Eastern Europe, 1942.* Available at: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/german-administration-of-europe-1942> (Accessed: 15 December 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Pohl, D. (2015) 'Masove vbyvstvo evreiv Ukrainy za nimets'koi viis'kovoii administratsii i v Reikhskomisariati Ukraina', in R. Brandon and W. Lower *Shoa v Ukraini: istoriya, svidchennia, uvichnennia*. Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, pp. 48-52.

NB: This region was annexed by Hungary from the Czech Republic in 1938, but the majority of the population were Ukrainian, and this region is now part of Ukraine. See Slavik, Yu. (2016). *Represyivna polityka Ugorschyny na Zakarpatti (1938-1944 rr.)*. Doctoral thesis. Uzhgorod.

the Holocaust in Hungary since most of the Jews and Roma from there were deported to Auschwitz in 1944.<sup>10</sup>

**The Governorate Transnistria** (territories of Transnistria, Bukovina and Bessarabia) was occupied by Romanians. According to Deletant, approximately 250,000 Jews and 12,000 Roma were killed there.<sup>11</sup> However, the Romanian policy about Jews differed slightly from the Nazi one. Most Jews were supposed to be deported from the Romanian territory into eastern provinces of Bessarabia and Bukovina.<sup>12</sup> The majority of Transnistrian Jews died in temporary camps and ghettos from starvation or disease; mass murders also took place in that territory, such as during the Bohdanivka massacre.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, for Jews from the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, in many cases, there was only one chance to survive: to cross the Romanian-German border.<sup>14</sup> Jews from Romanian territories were also used as a labour resource, and were slaves during the construction of the *Durchgangsstrasse IV* highway (from Lviv to Taganrog). These people were killed, and a considerable number died from terrible conditions (starvation, disease, heavy labour, the cruelty of guards) in labour camps and during work.<sup>15</sup>

The Holocaust in Eastern Galicia (Western Ukraine) was similar to the Holocaust in Poland because this territory was included in **the General Gouvernement** (Fig. 1.1.), but with local specifics. There were c. 460,000 – 480,000 Jews at the end of 1941 in the region.<sup>16</sup> Firstly, Jewish people were gathered in ghettos. Pohl has argued that Distrikt Galizien (administrative part of the General Government that included Western Ukrainian territory) had the cruellest

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<sup>10</sup> Gilbert, M. (1982). *Atlas of the Holocaust*. London: Michael Joseph/ Board of Deputies of British Jews, p. 184. Slavik, Yu. (2017). *Shliakh do Auschwitzu: Holokost na Zakarpatti*. Dnipro: Ukrain's'kyi ninstytut vyvchennia Holokostu „Tkuma”.

<sup>11</sup> Deletant, D. (2015). 'Transnistria i rumuns'ke rozviazania "evreiskogo pytannia"', in R. Brandon, and W. Lower *Shoa v Ukraini: istoriya, svidchennia, uvichnennia*. Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, p. 222.

<sup>12</sup> Solonari, V. (2017). 'A conspiracy to murder: explaining the dynamics of Romanian 'policy' towards Jews in Transnistria' *Journal of Genocide Research*, 19:1, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Dumitru, D. (2019) 'Genocide for "Sanitary Purposes"? The Bogdanovka Murder in Light of Postwar Trial Documents', *Journal of Genocidal Research*, Volume 21, Issue 2, pp. 157-177.

<sup>14</sup> Solonari, V. (2017), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Angrik, A. (2015). 'Znyschennia ta pratsia: evrei i Tranzhytnyi shliakh IV v Tsentral'nii Ukraini', in R. Brandon, and W. Lower *Shoa v Ukraini: istoriya, svidchennia, uvichnennia*. Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, pp. 290-293.

<sup>16</sup> Pohl, D. (1996) *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941-1944*. München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, p. 179.

policy against Jews in the whole occupation zone.<sup>17</sup> The reason given for the first extermination was that the "Soviet Jews" were ideological enemies of the Reich and thus were executed in October 1941.<sup>18</sup> After the extermination of "Soviet Jews," the next step was given codename Operation Reinhardt: the systematic annihilation of Jewish and Roma people in extermination camps: Belżec, Treblinka and Sobibór in Nazi-occupied Poland.<sup>19</sup> In March 1942, the deportation of Jewish people began from Eastern Galician cities and towns to Belżec for killing in gas chambers.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the exterminations on the spot (Holocaust by bullets) are applicable to the territory of **the Reichskommissariat Ukraine** (presented in Fig. 1.2.) and **the Military Administration Zone**. Therefore, it is these territories that will be the focus of this thesis. At the start of the Nazi-Soviet War on 22 June 1941, the Military Administration governed the entire territory of Ukraine. After the successful invasion in the first months, the occupied Soviet territories were divided between civilian and military administrations. Reichskommissariat Ukraine was the civilian occupation regime that was officially established in September 1941 and formally disbanded in November 1944. This area originally included the right bank of Ukraine with Vohlynnia, Podillia and Polissia. Additional advances of Nazi troops gave possession of more territories which were under military administration control to Reichskommissariat Ukraine, such as Poltavschna, Dnipropetrovshina, Khersonshchna, Mykolaivschina, Zaporizhia. The Crimea was under dual administration, it was officially controlled by Reichskommissariat Ukraine, but in practice, it was under the Military Administration. The administrative centre of Reichskommissariat Ukraine was given to smaller Rivne near the former Soviet-Polish border, in contrast with the capital of Soviet Ukraine – Kyiv.

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<sup>17</sup> Pohl, D. (1996), p. 406.

<sup>18</sup> NB: Western Ukraine and Western Belarus were annexed to Soviet Union in September 1939. For that reason, Jews from there calls "Soviet" by Nazis. Pohl, D. (1996), pp. 139-147.

<sup>19</sup> Arad, Yi. (1999) *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard death camps*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Musial, B. (2000) 'The Origins of 'Operation Reinhard': The Decision-Making Process for the Mass Murder of the Jews in the Generalgouvernement', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 28, pp. 113-153.

<sup>20</sup> Pohl, D. (1996), p. 188.



Fig. 1.2. Soviet territories under occupation, December 1941, after Arad. Yi<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Arad, Yi. (2009) *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem.

The first large-scale extermination actions of the local Jewish community began in the early months of occupation, even before the civil administration was established: in places like Novograd-Volyns'kyi (now Zviagel') in July 1941, Bila Tserkva in August 1941, and Berdychiv in September 1941.<sup>22</sup> These territories were originally Soviet ones (since 1922), and because of this, Jews were not the only high-priority target group for extermination. The *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (High Command of the Armed Forces) had created a particular order (the Commissar Order or official title Guidelines for the Treatment of Political Commissars from 6 June 1941) for Soviet territories even before *Operation Barbarossa* (the invasion of Soviet territories) began.<sup>23</sup> According to this order, the *evil of Communism* or *Judeo-Bolshevism* had to be annihilated. Consequently, all Soviet officers (Commissars), ideological military supervisors (politruk / political officers) had to be selected from the rest of the captured military personnel and killed instantly.

In some cases, the Nazis killed not only military personnel related to these victim groups but civilian political activists or young Jewish men who were capable of joining the resistance. Therefore, the war against the Soviet Union was the war of annihilation. In addition to total Jewish extermination, the local Slavic population had to be reduced through starvation known as *the Hunger Plan*.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the same sites were frequently used for burials of different victim groups. This regional detail should be borne in mind for Holocaust site investigations in these areas.

Although the mechanisms and processes of the Holocaust were different for each of the aforementioned administrations, the result was that Ukraine was dotted with Holocaust mass graves (Fig 1.3).<sup>25</sup> Because of criminal negligence caused by the rulers of the former USSR and lack of involvement from the current Ukrainian Government, most of these graves are still not

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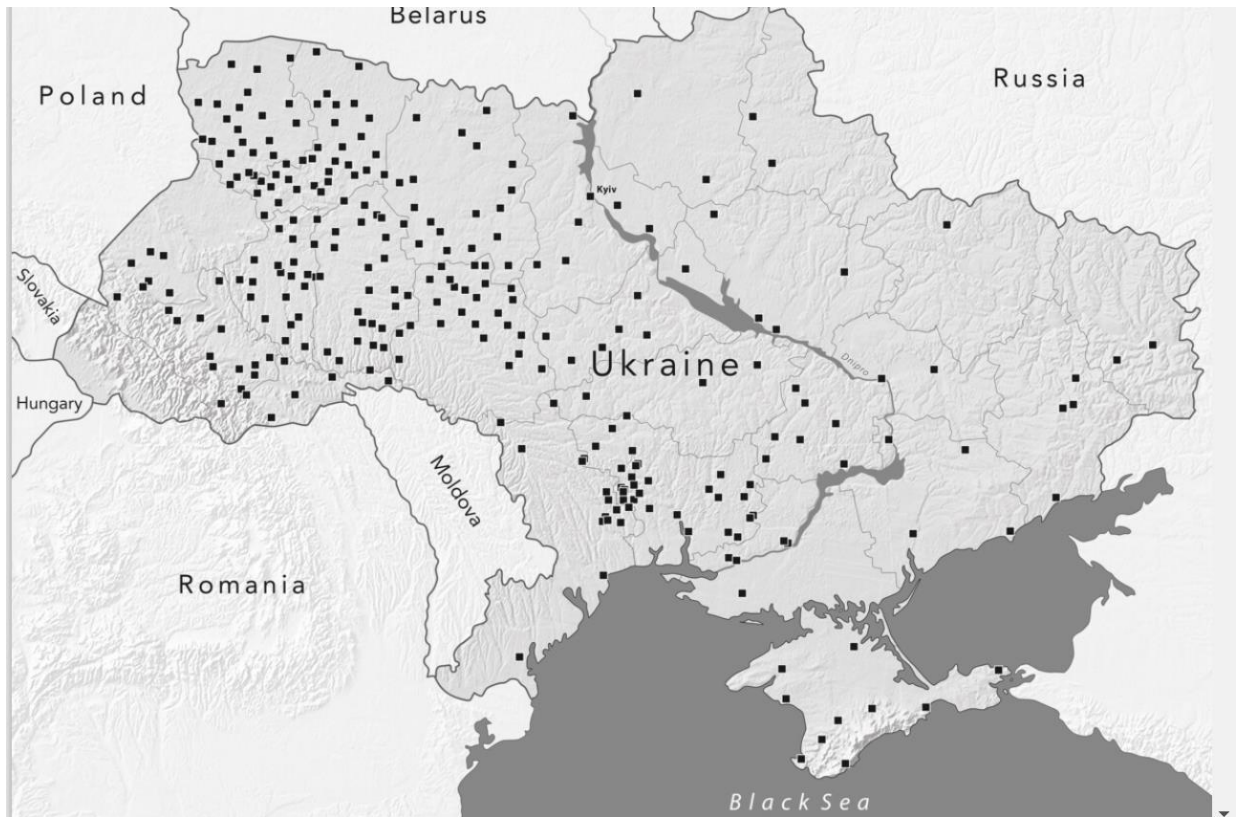
<sup>22</sup> For further information see: Pohl, D. (2015); Dean, M. (2013) 'German Ghettoization in Occupied Ukraine: Regional Patterns and Sources', In *The Holocaust in Ukraine: New Sources and Perspectives*. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, pp. 63-90; Berkhoff, K. (2011) *Zhnyva rozpachu. Zyttia i smert' v Ukraini pid natsyysts'koyu vladoyu*. Kyiv: Krytyka.

<sup>23</sup> Reinhard, O. (2005) 'The Fate of Soviet Soldiers in German Captivity', in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*. Symposium Presentations. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, pp. 129-130.

<sup>24</sup> Snyder, T. (2010) *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. Basic book, pp. 162-188; Berkhoff, K. (2011), pp. 169-174.

<sup>25</sup> *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, (2012) Volume. 2, *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe, part A*, pp. XXXI – XXXV.

officially commemorated.<sup>26</sup> Despite an increase in recent research projects and open access to archives, many mass graves remain unlocated. Therefore, this thesis focuses on a review of the potential and limits of applying forensic archaeological methods for the investigation of Holocaust killing sites and mass graves in Ukraine.



*Fig. 1.3. Settlements in Ukraine where more than 500 Jews were killed during WWII, after Protecting Memory Project. It should be noted that there might be actually more than one grave in each settlement, but the scale of the map does not provide an opportunity for demonstrating each known mass grave.<sup>27</sup>*

<sup>26</sup> Zeltser, A. (2018) *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, pp. 87 – 104; Etkind, A. (2018) *Krivoye gore: Pamiat' o nepogrebionnykh*. Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye.  
<sup>27</sup> Protecting memory (2019) Available at: <http://www.protecting-memory.org/en/introduction/> (Accessed: 15 December 2022).

## 1.2. Basis of study

Research on the Holocaust has a long tradition in Ukraine. However, there has never been a comprehensive study that combines the benefits of historical and forensic-archaeological approaches based on local specifics. Even though there has been a wide range of forensic and archaeological approaches for Holocaust crime investigation since the 1940s, there has not been a critical review of previous investigations and research strategies in present-day Ukraine. Moreover, advances in contemporary science make it possible to re-evaluate the conclusions of previous forensic investigations and provide a more accurate interpretation of the facts. This study draws upon various aspects of theoretical, disciplinary, and methodological approaches to the investigation of Holocaust sites in Ukraine as well as in other countries.

Studies of this period severely lack "traditional" historical sources; in various cases, there is only fragmented data available concerning the means of the killing of the Jewish population and their burial places. Regarding the events that were documented, information differs significantly between German and Soviet records.<sup>28</sup> In these cases, the use of an archaeological approach, and eyewitness testimonies becomes indispensable. As oral histories are subjective, and archaeological methods (especially non-invasive ones) are open to forms of interpretation, the use of a wide range of sources provides the opportunity for the most accurate reconstruction of events.

A peculiarity of the Holocaust in the territory of present Ukraine was that these tragic events were taking place in plain sight, not hidden from human eyes, but in towns and villages.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> NB: For example: the difference between numbers of victims in: Tsvetukha forest (Shepetivka) 70 / c. 2200 (here and later Nazi report / Soviet report): *Shepetovka* in *The Untold stories* (web page) Available at: <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/untold-stories/killing-site/14626890-Shepetovka-Synagogue> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022); Piatnichany brick factory (Vinnytsia) 146 / 350: *Vinnitsa* in *The Untold stories* (web page) Available at: <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/untold-stories/community/14621890-Vinnitsa> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022); Jewish cemetery (Brailiv) 500 / 1800: *Brailov* in *The Untold stories* (web page) Available at: <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/untold-stories/community/14621632-Brailov> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>29</sup> Desbois, P. (2013) 'The Witnesses of Ukraine or Evidence from the Ground: The Research of Yahad—In Unum', in: *The Holocaust in Ukraine: New Sources and Perspectives*. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, pp. 94-95.



Furthermore, even if mass graves were located outside of towns or village boundaries during the Holocaust, the result of modern urbanisation means that today they are located in the middle of urban areas, used as garbage dumps, or areas for agricultural purposes. Several examples of this are presented in Plate 1.1. Research relating to these sites is complicated by human activity that has been taking place in the past 75 years since those dramatic events. An archaeological approach can therefore draw upon an understanding of landscapes past and present in order to identify grave locations, overcoming some of the issues that arise by only using historical sources.



*Plate 1.1. Location of killing sites in mass graves in: 1. Babyn Yar (Kyiv); 2. Vinnytsia; 3. Former kolhoz 'Serp i Molot' (Boryspil); Samgorodok (Vinnytsia region). Author's own photos.*

Often there was no commemoration concerning many of these sites in the post-war years, which means that the primary task of a researcher in most cases is to identify the specific location of killing and burial sites. Moore argued that Holocaust site commemoration serves as "justice and reconciliation, forgiveness and retribution, remembrance and forgetting".<sup>30</sup> According to Young, "the reason given for Holocaust memorials and the kind of memory they

<sup>30</sup> Moore, L. (2009) '(Re) Covering the past, Remembering trauma: The Politics of Commemoration at Site of Atrocity', *Journal of Public and International Affairs*. 20, p. 48.

generate are as various as the sites themselves".<sup>31</sup> Their presence can lead to challenges and solutions. Those memorials might play a reconciliation role for local communities. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population of Ukraine (poly-ethnic and of different religious confessions) has suffered a whole series of tragedies: WWI, a bloody struggle for control for the territory during 1917-1920 period (the Ukrainian War of Independence ), many occurrences of the Great (Stalin's) Terror with repressions and deportations of entire nations, several natural famines and an artificially induced one in 1932-1933 (the Great Famine or Holodomor), levelling of cultural and national differences during the construction of the image of a "Soviet person", the tragedy of WWII. Consequently, places for reconciliation and consideration are functional for finding solutions between different historical remembrance narratives.<sup>32</sup> Holocaust sites require empathy, and it helps to deepen the association between the narrative and the audience. Furthermore, the role of Holocaust sites could enable reinforcement and perpetuation of memory in education via tourism of various kinds and commemoration activity. For example, Ukraine is one of the popular directions for heritage tourism. Site visits could show the crucial difference between the Holocaust in camps (in Western Europe) and the Holocaust by bullets (in Eastern Europe) much more clearly than academic publications. Therefore, understanding both the history and the cultural memory and post-landscapes of mass grave sites is essential if effective commemorative and educational solutions are to be found. Examples of the challenges related to these issues are discussed further in Chapter 2.

In light of this project's aim, one of the essential purposes for genocide site commemoration in Ukraine is also site protection from illegal activity such as looting. Lacunas in current Ukrainian laws and lack of engagement of local authorities in approximately all regions, has led to extreme activity by illegal diggers ("black archaeologists") on most archaeological sites in Ukraine. The specifics of Holocaust sites - such as their often-unmarked locations or absence of protection - make these sites easy targets for illegitimate excavation. Hence, Chapter 2 classifies the major gaps in the Ukrainian legal system related to Holocaust site investigation and protection.

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<sup>31</sup> Young, J. (1993) *The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning*. Yale University Press, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Moore, L. (2009) p. 48; Young, J. (1993) p. 2.

Furthermore, Holocaust studies in Ukraine have focused on the impact of Nazi persecution on Jewish communities, since they undoubtedly comprise the largest number of victims. Dawidowicz estimated about 1,500,000 Jewish victims were murdered in present Ukraine.<sup>33</sup> A more recent study by Kruglov mentioned 1,866,000 – 2,100,000 Jewish victims, which comprised 60% of the total non-military death toll on Ukrainian territory.<sup>34</sup> Still, the fate of many other groups, such as Roma, Soviet PoW, and disabled persons have been investigated to a lesser extent. According to Kruglov's studies, the death toll for non-Jewish civilian victims was c. 1,300,000 individuals.<sup>35</sup> Further research about all of these groups is needed. The ethical complexities associated with the presence of people from different victim groups in the same grave also require a review.

This project focuses upon mass grave investigation as these represent the most common Holocaust era sites in present day Ukraine. In many case studies, information regarding events during the Holocaust is available exclusively from survivor or eyewitness testimonies or, even worse, only through perpetrator's lens. The forensic archaeological approach gives voice to people who perished during the catastrophe, and their burial sites could be the last traces of their existence. The author's ambition is to show their experiences of the victims through biographies that are included in corresponding chapters.

### **1.3. Aim and objectives**

This research study was designed with the **aim** of identifying the potential and limitations of forensic archaeological methods to increase understanding of Holocaust sites in Ukraine.

The following objectives indicate the various steps that were completed to accomplish the main research aim. The **objectives** are:

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<sup>33</sup> Dawidowicz, L. (1975), p. 403.

<sup>34</sup> Kruglov, A. (2015) 'Evreis'ki vtraty v Ukraini, 1941-1944 rr.', in R. Brandon and W. Lower *Shoa v Ukraini: istoriya, vidchennia, uvichnennia*. Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, pp. 392-393.

<sup>35</sup> Kruglov, A. (2015) pp. 392-393.

**Objective 1:** to analyse the current Ukrainian legal system regarding the protection of cultural and archaeological heritage.

**Objective 2:** to apply forensic analyses to the previous historic medico-legal investigation reports based on current (forensic and archaeological) knowledge, and to determine gaps in previous investigative approaches applied in the territory of Ukraine.

**Objective 3:** to evaluate the different archaeological strategies and methods that have been used by other organisations at Holocaust sites in Ukraine in the more recent past.

**Objective 4:** to apply non-invasive forensic archaeological methods in order to identify killing sites and mass graves within case study areas, and to examine their effectiveness.

**Objective 5:** to provide guidance on the most suitable way for the government and local authorities to protect killing sites and mass graves in the future.

A broad range of disciplines was used for this thesis in addition to archaeology and forensic archaeology, for example: historical approaches, Sovietology, cultural heritage studies and memory studies. It is clear that no single study can encompass the entire country, considering the difficulties in understanding its history.<sup>36</sup> Hence, this research focuses on the present Ukraine that was inside the Soviet Union before WWII and does so via several case studies.<sup>37</sup> In this context, the subject of this research largely focuses on the destiny of Soviet Ukrainian Jews and Soviet PoWs but is not limited to only these issues. First, the case studies of Busk (Lviv region) were drawn upon to illustrate the previous application of archaeological approaches and forensic archaeological methods in Ukraine (Fig 1.4). Second, another essential component of this project was the comparison of the theoretical principles promoted by previous investigators and their implementation in practice at different sites, such as

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<sup>36</sup> NB: The territory of present Ukraine split among different states: the Austria-Hungary Empire, Russian Empire, USSR, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For more information about the history of Ukraine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Snyder, T. (2010); Plokhly, S. (2015) *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books, pp.133-277.

<sup>37</sup> NB: Here should be mentioned a few exclusions for some case studies in this context: Busk is in Lviv region. The Soviet Union annexed this territory in 1939; also, a case study about Soviet investigation in sovkhos "Krasnyi" in Crimea needs some explanation. The Crimea was incorporated into the territory of Ukrainian SSSR in 1954 and it is still a territory of Ukraine in present borders. That is why this case study is included in this research.

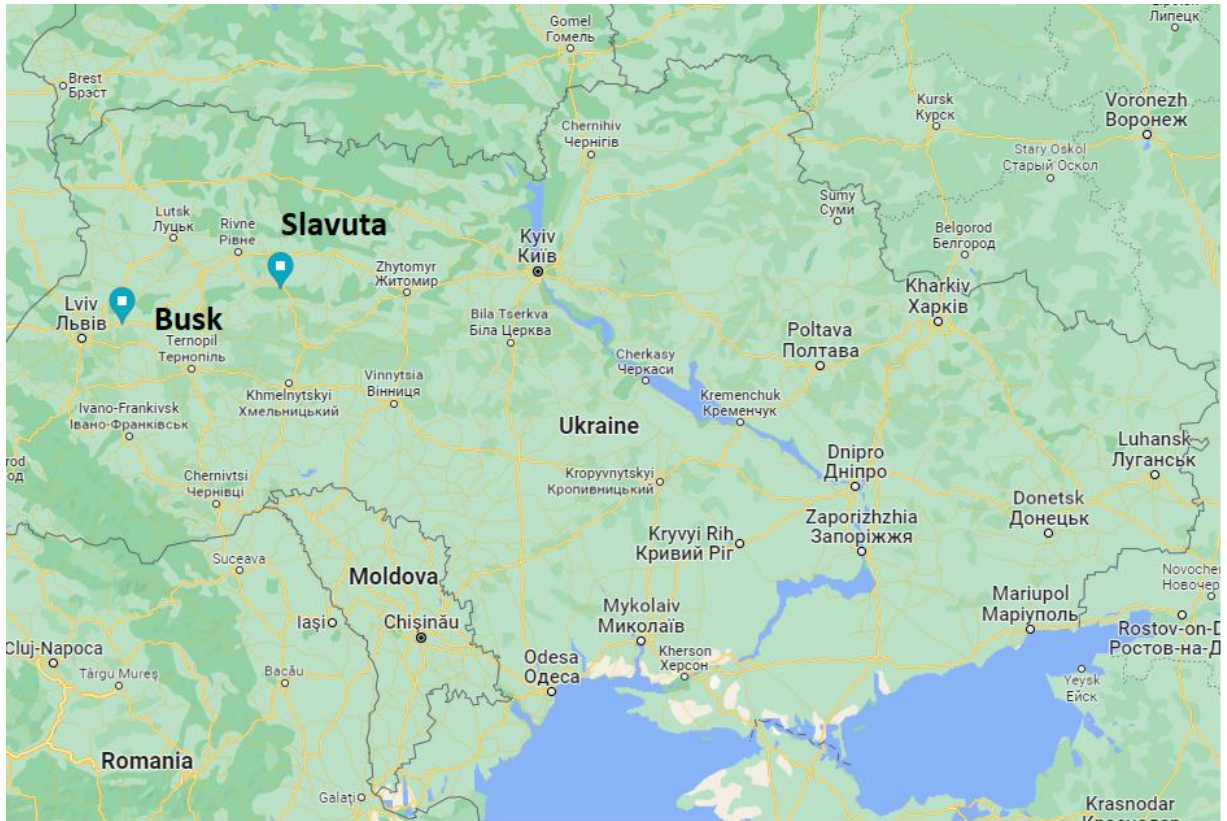
Geographical names were mostly written in Ukrainian spelling for most of the cases. However, there were a few exceptions where Russian versions of their spelling were used based on the version used in archival documents (e.g., sovkhos "Krasnyi" (Russian spelling) vs radgosp "Chervonyi" (Ukrainian spelling); Kiev (Russian version) vs Kyiv (Ukrainian version)). Personal names have been written in form given in sources. Version selection made according to simplifying search by author.

Slavuta. Specifically, this focused on the work of the Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the Fascist German Invaders and their Accomplices, and of the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organisations, State Enterprises, and Institutions of the USSR (ChGK; referred to as "the Extraordinary Commission" later in the text), which was the main investigatory body for Nazi crimes in the USSR after Nazi occupation. This approach helped understand the procedure of data collection and form the aims and objectives of the investigation. Furthermore, better insight into the methodology used by the experts led to the more explicit interpretation of their conclusions. Third, a cutting-edge methodology derived from forensic archaeology, alongside the use of post-war eyewitness testimonies to verify data from reports of the Extraordinary Commission, was applied at Slavuta (Fig 1.4.). Slavuta is a small city in the present-day Khmelnytskyi region (historical Podillia) in Ukraine. Next to a sizeable Jewish community, this city also hosted a military regiment, which served as border patrol before WWII. Terrain was converted to a PoW camp during the occupation for sick, captured soldiers in 1941. The crimes in Slavuta against Jews (mass extermination of local Jewish people from Slavuta and Slavuta areas) and PoWs (there was situated one of the biggest PoW camps in Ukraine) were well documented by Soviet bodies of power, and the accounts are available from a wide range of sources for comparison. The uniqueness of the site, therefore, provides the possibility to analyse evidence from two different site types within the same terrain, making Slavuta a remarkable place for Holocaust studies in the Ukrainian context.

This doctoral research project aims to contribute to the broader discussion of Holocaust studies in Ukraine (including but not limited to topics of the Holocaust by bullets and extermination of Soviet PoWs) from archaeological perspectives, drawing upon diverse physical evidence of genocide (mass graves and killing sites in the first instance). In more specific terms the main research questions of this thesis are:

- Is it possible for unseeable evidence of past atrocities to be made visible again?
- Is it true that Nazi crimes on Ukrainian soil left no traces and no recognizable graves in many places after decades of silence provoked by the Soviet state?

- What silences and opportunities present themselves in Soviet investigative and forensic reports?



*Fig. 1.4. Location of sites for case studies<sup>38</sup>*

#### 1.4. Thesis structure

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Whilst this chapter has introduced the main topics relevant to this study, the remaining seven chapters will analyse the potential and limitations of the use of forensic archaeological methods and a variety of opportunities for their deployment, commemoration and site protection, education and community projects. Chapter 2 discusses forensic archaeological and medico-legal approaches that were deployed during previous investigations at sites pertaining to the Holocaust and other mass killings across the world and in Ukraine, demonstrating international and regional specifics. Furthermore, this chapter presents the challenges many scholars and practitioners (who may use forensic archaeological approaches in the future) will face, and considers ethical and legal

<sup>38</sup> Google maps

issues, and commemoration controversies that may arise. Using case studies of Busk, Chapter 2 also focuses on an examination of results for a specific project that has used archaeological methods for studying Holocaust sites in Ukraine. It also highlights the issue of commemoration. Previous investigations were examined with the hindsight and expertise provided by modern forensic archaeological approaches in order to evaluate what information was found, what was lost or downplayed during these previous investigations and what new data could be derived retrospectively via desk-based assessment. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the research project. This chapter consists of three main components: the overall methodological approach, the methods of data collection and data analysis employed, and the rationale for method selection.

The focus of Chapter 4 is the evaluation of practices during searches and exhumations that were undertaken by the Extraordinary Commission in the 1940s. This chapter outlines the baseline methods and principles employed by the Commission and establishes and rationalises the limits in its activity (related to both the particulars of the Soviet regime and the level of knowledge concerning forensic science at the time). Beyond that, historical background related to the involvement of Soviet forensic scientists in the work of the Extraordinary Commission (uncovered based on research conducted in several archival collections) is presented. It uses the broadest range of data available by using all potential sources and materials providing the best opportunity to evaluate all available information about killing sites and mass grave locations. In addition, a review of data collected 75 years ago with the benefit of current forensic archaeological knowledge allows for a deeper understanding of the specifics of the Holocaust in Ukraine.

Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to a single site, but despite the territorial commonality, they describe two different evidence types. Both chapters discuss the results of archaeological fieldwork conducted by the author and verified by other types of sources. The centre of attention of Chapter 5 is the site of the extermination of the regional Jewish community in Slavuta (also known as the Jewish mass grave near the Water Tower in Slavuta). Chapter 6 focuses on Slavuta PoW camp, which is better known in historiography as Grosslazarett because mostly sick or injured Soviet PoW's were held there.

Chapter 7 brings together the concerns pursued in the thesis by collectively evaluating previous investigations, the author's own case studies and current Ukrainian legislation. This chapter explores various levels of involvement of archaeological approaches for modern Ukrainian society, and the ethical and legal issues which limit the more extensive application of archaeological methods for these investigations. Furthermore, it discusses practical solutions which might be offered by employing forensic archaeological methods for Holocaust studies in Ukraine. In addition, this chapter provides the conclusion, recommendations for future investigations and further work required.



## Chapter 2: Considerations and standards for study

### 2.1. Introduction

As stated above, the events of the Holocaust that took place within the present territory of Ukraine was both multi-vectored and multi-faceted. Due to strict word limits, traditional historiography will not be provided. However, some trends in modern historiography of Holocaust studies in Ukraine are highlighted. The Holocaust on Ukrainian soil had been analysed based on administrative organisations prior to/during WWII of other countries (i.e., Soviet Union<sup>39</sup>, Poland<sup>40</sup>, Romania<sup>41</sup>). This approach is important for understanding some causes of mass violence and its scale but often ignored important regional specifics of Ukrainian terrain and historical background.

Nevertheless, remarkable studies of scholars in the first decades of the 2000s switched the focus of attention to the specifics of the Holocaust in different parts of now-Ukrainian territories, such as general administrative divisions or smaller districts. Books of Berkhoff and Lower introduced issues of Holocaust studies on the East (beyond Auschwitz), and Father Desbois raised a problem with unknown and uncommemorated mass graves for Western audiences.<sup>42</sup> However, those publications had dug only a shallow layer of this field (due to many factors: limited access to Soviet materials, a massive number of unpublished firstly-discovered sources, lack of previous studies, a wide range of affected groups, etc.). However, agreeing with Stone, it should be highlighted that such works as Lower's study "have started to go beyond these casual mentions [displacement and mass killings]."<sup>43</sup> Lower and Snyder in their work evidence that the Holocaust on Ukrainian soil could be analysed through the 'colonial genocidal' paradigm.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Arad, Yi. (2009); Fox, T.C. (2004). *The Holocaust under Communism*. In: Stone, D. (eds) *The Historiography of the Holocaust*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

<sup>40</sup> Pohl, D. (1996);

<sup>41</sup> Ioanid R. (2000) *The Holocaust in Romania : the destruction of jews and gypsies under the antonescu regime 1940-1944*. Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>42</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011); Lower, W. (2005) *Nazi empire-building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*. University of North Carolina Press; Desbois, P. (2011).

<sup>43</sup> Stone, D. (2008). *The Holocaust and Its Historiography*. In: Stone, D. (eds) *The Historiography of Genocide*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. p. 388.

<sup>44</sup> Stone, D. (2008), p. 388; Snyder, T. (2010); Lower, W. (2005).

It would be fair to say that the last few years have produced revolutionary publications in the field of local and microhistorical studies of the Holocaust era. Scholars based their investigations on various approaches: gender-based<sup>45</sup>, forensic<sup>46</sup>, spatial<sup>47</sup>, ethnical<sup>48</sup>, and many others. However, comprehensive studies regarding the Holocaust in Ukraine still have to be written.

This research focuses on mass grave investigations of Holocaust victims across the whole of Ukraine; for this reason, the author decided to centre on the analysis of the application of a tested approach previously used in similar investigations across Europe.

The examination of genocide sites, including those related to the Holocaust, is not a terra incognita in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Forensic and archaeological investigations of mass graves and other sites connected to these events have developed significantly, particularly over the last 40 years. This chapter will review these developments, providing the necessary background for the following chapters on specifics for applying a forensic archaeological approach and for the current situation in Ukraine. As a starting point, it should be mentioned that forensic archaeological methodologies are not commonly applied in Ukraine, and forensic archaeology is not considered a separate discipline. The result is that criminologists and police forces are not trained in archaeological methods, nor do they understand their potential in missing person cases. Current Ukrainian legislation also does not have guidelines for such expertise. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse the state of current Ukrainian legislation in order to understand why and how non-experts are used to conduct searches at Holocaust sites.

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<sup>45</sup> Havryshko, M. (2021). Listening to Women's Voices: Jewish Rape Survivors' Testimonies in Soviet War Crimes Trials. In D. Nešťáková, K. Grosse-Sommer, B. Klacsmann, & J. Drábik (Eds.), *If This Is a Woman: Studies on Women and Gender in the Holocaust*. Academic Studies Press.

<sup>46</sup> Lower, W. (2021) *The Ravine: A Family, a Photograph, a Holocaust Massacre Revealed*. London: head of Zeus.

<sup>47</sup> Beorn, W. (2019) *Unravelling Janowska: Excavating an Understudied Camp through Spatial Testimonies*. In *Beyond "Ordinary Men"*, Leiden: Brill, Schöningh; Mykhalchuk, R. (2020) *Shramy na tili mista: mistsia vbystv yevreiv v m.Rivnepid chas Golokostu*. *City: History, Culture Society*, 9(2). pp.105-125.

<sup>48</sup> Tyaglyy, M. (2017) *Peresliduvannia ta vbystvstva romiv na terenah Ukrainy u chasy Drugoi svitovoi viiny*. Kyiv. Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies.

Agreeing with Beorn argument that Eastern Europe's cities, towns and villages are still full of the ghosts of the Holocaust in metaphorical and literal meanings, this thesis evaluated the potential of the application of forensic archaeological methods for the investigation of this bitter past.<sup>49</sup> Mass graves of Holocaust victims have certainly become a part of the wider *deathscape* of present Ukraine, which is not only perceived through emotions and beliefs, culture, and community but also legislation and heritage management, all of which are constantly changing due to the ongoing situation in this country.<sup>50</sup>

Ferrándiz and Robben argued that, increasingly, archaeological investigations (including exhumations) became important tools to reassert the existence of unknown/forgotten victims and reconstruct their history (their last minutes, hours, days).<sup>51</sup> Moreover, mass grave investigations are becoming crucial to transnational human rights discourses and transitional justice practices. This has not yet been the case in Ukraine with regards to Holocaust victims, but, perhaps drawing upon the lessons from *Forensic Architecture*, it is important that in the future, information about these crimes is uncovered and discussed in public forums and they are commemorated adequately.<sup>52</sup>

## **2.2 Overview of the development of field investigation at Holocaust sites and genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

This study's purpose is not just tied to researching the history of Holocaust sites in Ukraine, but also to the analysis of previous cases employing archaeological approaches at such sites in the post-war era. This allows the evolution of this approach for the Ukrainian context to be traced.

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<sup>49</sup> Beorn, W. (2018) p .272.

<sup>50</sup> Maddrell, A. and Sidaway, J. (Eds) (2010) *Deathscapes. Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning and Remembrance*. Routledge, pp. 4-8.

<sup>51</sup> Ferrándiz, F. and Robben, C. (2015) *Necropolitics: Mass Graves and the Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp.1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Wiezman, E. (2017) *Forensic Architecture*. New York: Zone book, pp. 64-68.

### 2.2.1. Early investigations

It is important to note here that, before WWII, humanity had not encountered the necessity to investigate mass graves in a legal context. Initial attempts to conduct searches of mass graves were carried out at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Dreyfus noted, forensic techniques employed after WWI were quickly forgotten or were not commonly applied after a certain amount of time.<sup>53</sup> The concept of *genocide* was introduced by Rafał Lemkin only in November 1943, and it was not adopted into international law until 1948.<sup>54</sup> The process of uncovering mass graves during legal investigations was also a unique concept for that time. In several ways, **the Germans** were the actual pioneers in this initiative as they uncovered the graves of the Soviet repression victims: in Lviv (Prison on Łacki Street), at the Park of Culture in Vinnytsia and, most famously, in Katyń.<sup>55</sup> The methodology employed in each of these cases still needs its own separate analysis. However, in summary, the primary methods employed were uncovering human remains, wound and trauma analysis, and the identification of individuals through visual confirmation (using documents, personal belongs and/or asking close relatives to view the corpses). The purpose of these investigations at government level was primarily propaganda.<sup>56</sup> It means that the conclusions of experts need to be re-evaluated according to modern knowledge and without ideological pressure.

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<sup>53</sup> Dreyfus, J.-M. (2018) The Mass Graves of Hohne and the French Attempt (and Failure) at Exhumation (1958-1969), *Accessing Campscapes: Inclusive Strategies for Using European Conflicted Heritage* 3, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Lemkin, R. (1944) *Axis rule in occupied Europe: laws of occupation, analysis of government, proposals for redress*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law; *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (1948), art. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Struve K. (2018) 'Masovi vbyvstva viazniv lvivs'kyh turem:scho vidomo pro mistisia ta kil'kist' zhertv' *Ukraina Moderna*. Available at: <http://uamoderna.com/md/struve-lonckoho> (Accessed: 15 December 2022); *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Katyn im auftrage des Auswärtigen amtes auf grund urkundlichen beweismaterials zusammengestellt*, (1943). Berlin, Zentral Verlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf; *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Winniza* (1944) Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf; Paperno, I. (2001). 'Exhuming the Bodies of Soviet Terror', *Representations*, 75(1), pp. 99-118; *Stenogramma zasedaniya Chrezvychnoi Komissii po rassledovaniyu nemetskiykh zverstv ot 23 Yanvaria* .1944. Available at: <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/167106-stenogramma-zasedaniya-chrezvychnoy-komissii-po-rassledovaniyu-nemetskih-zverstv-ot-23-yanvarya-1944-goda#mode/inspect/page/2/zoom/4> (Accessed: 15 December 2022), pp. 479-481; Sorokina, M. (2010) 'Between Power and Professionals: Soviet Doctors Examine Katyn"', in *Soviet medicine: culture, practice, and science*. DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, pp. 155-173; Stahl, Z. (1965) *The crime of Katyn. Facts and documents*. London: Polish Cultural Foundation, pp. 114-125.

<sup>56</sup> For example: Mertvi klychut' do pomsty. Vinnytsia – misto plachu. *Vinnyts'ki visti*. 11<sup>th</sup> August 1943; U L'vivs'kyh tiurnah NKVD. Ukrains'ke slovo. 7 August 1941.

In the 1940s, the **Extraordinary State Commission** for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the Fascist German Invaders and their Accomplices, and of the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organisations, State Enterprises, and Institutions of the USSR (ChGK; referred to as "the Extraordinary Commission" later in the text) was also making attempts to use what would now be defined as forensic archaeological techniques for Holocaust studies in the territory of modern Ukraine. The Extraordinary Commission was chartered by The Council of People's Commissars, so in official documents, it is frequently referred to as "Government Commission". Its purpose was to collect evidence of crimes committed by the Nazi regime and its Allies during the occupation of Soviet territories. The Extraordinary Commission became the main investigatory body for Nazi crimes in the USSR after Nazi occupation.

The methodology for the Extraordinary Commission investigations is analysed in Chapter 4. However, it is important to note that, just like German forensic teams, the Soviets were also employing forensic methods (uncovering of mass graves, wound and trauma analysis, and victim identification) and they too were also doing this for propaganda purposes for the benefit of the Soviet government. The conclusions of their investigations also became the fundamental proof for further actions of post-war legal proceedings. For example, the Extraordinary Commission reports were added to the List of Evidence submitted at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. The full list consisted of 314 files, and 27 of them were the Commission reports.<sup>57</sup> Notably, not all reports were about Soviet territories, but also about Poland.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the Extraordinary Commission's reports were used as evidence for further trials in the USSR and other countries.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Trial of the Major War Crimes before The International Military Tribunal*. (1949), Vol. XXIV, pp. 170-186.

<sup>58</sup> *Trial of the Major War Crimes before The International Military Tribunal*. (1947), Vol. VII, pp. 451-453; 546; 565; 590-591.

NB: the territory of Poland, especially Eastern Poland, was liberated by the Red Army. Soviet soldiers and officers were the first who saw evidence of the Nazis crimes, and usually, they attempted to record it. The Extraordinary Commission often participated in the investigation process after. For example, Soviet investigators have taken part in crime investigations in Majdanek and Treblinka.

<sup>59</sup> *Kyivs'kyi protses: dokumenty i materialy*. (1995) Kyiv: Lybid'; *Sovietskii Niurenberg* (web page) Available at: <https://histrf.ru/collections/Soviet-Nuremberg> (Accessed: 15 December 2022); Dean, M. (2005) 'Ghettos in the Occupied Soviet Union: The Nazi "System"', in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*. Symposium Presentations. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, pp.37-60; Hicks, J. (2013) "'Soul Destroyers': Soviet Reporting of Nazi Genocide and its Perpetrators at the Krasnodar and Khar' kov Trials', *History*, 98 (332), pp.530-547.

The Extraordinary Commissions teams or surveyors developed their expertise for mass grave investigations during their work; their knowledge and experience had been transformed to more accurate methodology for medico-legal investigation of burial sites later. The Extraordinary Commission had the unique opportunity to work with corpses while decomposition was in progress. This fact allowed them to collect the most comprehensive information about the crime. However, the level of development of forensic science and available methods did not allow them to interpret information in as much detail as modern researchers can. The same approach was employed for later investigations of wartime crimes in the Soviet Union. Even though forensic methods became more accurate, the **Soviet medico-legal experts** were applying the same set of methods as the Extraordinary Commission such as uncovering remains and wound and trauma analysis as recently as the 1960s-1970s.<sup>60</sup> Although Soviet forensic scientists used the Extraordinary Commission reports for identification of site locations and reconstruction of a crime scene, critical analysis of data was not performed.

Another important reason for employing medico-legal methods (primarily the recovery of the remains) in the aftermath of WWII was the process of identification of citizens of specific countries and transporting their remains to their respective homelands. For example, in order to reconstruct the fate of French citizens during WWII, **Mission de Recherche des victimes de la Guerre** (Mission for the Search for Victims of the War) (henceforth the Mission) was established between 1946 and 1958.<sup>61</sup> The Mission aimed to systematically search Nazi concentration camp spaces and excavate the corpses of victims in attempt to identify people who had been deported from France. However the most significant investigation took place at Dachau (Bavaria, Germany) where 10,000 victims' remains were supposed to be recovered, and at Bergen Belsen concentration camp (Lower Saxony) where at least 12,000 victims'

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<sup>60</sup> For example, exhumation of mass graves near sovkhos 'Krasnyyi' in the Crimea in 1970 at USHMM/ RG-31.018M/ 20404/ vol. 39.

<sup>61</sup> Rosensaft, M. (1979) 'The Mass-Graves of Bergen-Belsen: Focus for Confrontation', *Jewish Social Studies* 41(2), pp. 155.

remains were expected to be exhumed.<sup>62</sup> This aim was not reached because the Mission faced strong resistance within the Jewish community of former inmates of the camp, and subsequently Jewish organisations across the world.<sup>63</sup> The nature of controversies was related to the methods used by the Mission. They employed heavy machinery for the excavation of mass graves and any disturbance of Jewish burials contravened Jewish religious laws (Halakha; for further discussion see below). This conflict raised another topic for discussion: who determines whether a victim was a Jew or not a Jew? It meant the key component of further exhumations became personal identification in order to not only understand the fate of an individual, but to select (in fact, to approve) the most appropriate research methods. Both of these issues are still relevant for applying forensic archaeological methods for Holocaust studies. This brings to the fore a crucial question of what is more important – ‘nationality or religion’ - when determining how to handle human remains. During the Mission’s practice, the French Government claimed that "the French had the right to exhume and repatriate the corpses of their comrades in arms to French soil".<sup>64</sup> This resulted in some Jewish activists accusing a number of French citizens of nationalism.

### 2.2.2. Early fieldwork campaigns for mass grave and Holocaust sites investigations by archaeologists

In the 1980s, archaeological excavations began to facilitate the reconstruction of the process of extermination of Jewish people. The first investigation took place in **Chełmno (Kulmhof)** – a Nazi extermination camp near Łódź in Poland. This fieldwork campaign was initiated in order to prevent damage of the site from the construction works in the Rzuchów forest.<sup>65</sup> The team of Pawlicka-Nowak from the Konin Museum performed excavations at the camp area in 1986-1987, 1997-2002 and 2003-2004 and collected one of the most significant collections of

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<sup>62</sup> Dreyfus, J.-M. (2014) ‘Renationalizing bodies? The French search mission for the corpses of deportees in Germany, 1946–58’, In J.-M. Dreyfus and E. Anstett (eds) *Human Remains and Violence. Methodological Approaches*. Manchester University Press, p. 136.

<sup>63</sup> Rosensaft, M. (1979) pp. 161-172.

<sup>64</sup> Dreyfus, J.-M. (2018) ‘The Mass Graves of Hohne and the French Attempt (and Failure) at Exhumation (1958-1969)’, *Accessing Campscapes: Inclusive Strategies for Using European Conflicted Heritage* 3, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Stromski, M. (2010) *Archeologia internowania na wybranych przykładach badań byłych niemieckich obozów zagłady na ziemiach polskich*. Available on: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://www.polska1918-89.pl/pdf/archeologia-internowania-na-wybranych-przykladach-badan-bylych-niemiec,4589.pdf (Accessed on: 17 December 2022), p. 163.

"extermination camp artefacts". Archaeological data led to the reconstruction of the death route of victims that were marched naked from the Castle cellars to gas vans (special trucks created for suffocation victims through the carbon monoxide). The remains of five of the mass graves in which some of the deceased were subsequently buried and the "crematoriums" and "field furnaces" where others were burnt were excavated in the Rzuchów forest, four kilometres away from the camp.<sup>66</sup>

Archaeological fieldwork campaigns led by Koła also took place on the territory of the former **Bełżec extermination camp** near current Polish-Ukrainian border in 1997-1999.<sup>67</sup> This camp was completely demolished in the beginning of 1943 in order to hide traces of Nazi crimes (mass extermination of Jews and Roma). In order to survey the vast territory, archaeologists employed test pit techniques. If researchers identified something different than human remains or ash, they excavated a wider area. This approach allowed them to discover 10 mass graves with inhumations, 23 graves with traces of ash (based on analyses of the aerial photo taken in 1944 by Luftwaffe, not all of these graves were in the camp boundaries), the place where cremation possibly took place, the siding of a railway, and camp building remains. The results of Koła's investigation confirmed existence of the extermination camp and traces of Operation Reinhard there. The camp became part of Majdanek State Museum in 2004 and a new monument was constructed. A symbolic *death road* or *Szczeina* was built on the spot where archaeological investigations confirmed remains of *sluice* or *der Schlauch* – a narrow fenced corridor to the gas chambers. In addition, archaeological excavation helped identify the approximate limits of the burial. A field with crushed stones was created as a symbolical grave (Jews traditionally bring stones to the grave for commemoration).<sup>68</sup> The entire area of this field contained human remains, specifically ash blended with soil.

The rationale for the application of archaeological approaches in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century has differed at sites across Europe. For example, a comprehensive renovation

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66 Gilead, I., Haimi, Yo., Mazurek, W. (2009). 'Excavating Nazi Extermination Centres', *Present Pasts*, 1. pp. 16-19.

67 Koła, A. (2000) *Bełżec: the Nazi Camp for Jews in Light of Archaeological Sources: Excavations 1997–1999*. Warsaw—Washington, The Council for the Protection of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

68 *Bełżec. Pomnik i jego symbolika*. Available at: <https://www.belzec.eu/pl/page/upamietnienie/183> (Accessed on: 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021).



programme at **Sobibór's campscape** (a Nazi extermination camp near Lublin in Poland) was initiated at the beginning of 2000. Here it should be mentioned that some of excavations were made for research purposes too, not only as a part of this programme. This camp was demolished after an inmates' uprising in October of 1943. However, there were many human remains, and camp structures discovered in the aftermath of WWII. The purpose of the archaeological approach was to establish camp boundaries, the remains of camp buildings such as the gas chambers, and to identify the locations of mass graves. Since most victims were Jews from different countries, rabbinical support became a requirement for archaeological work. Rabbi Schudrich (Chief Rabbi of Poland) noted that it is the obligation for all death camp investigations to observe the following rules: (1) any human remains must not be disturbed and (2) visitors must not walk through the mass graves.<sup>69</sup> Despite the Rabbinical consideration, the Sobibór investigation was predominantly invasive. The main focus of excavation was mostly on non-burial sites, but in some cases, graves were disturbed. In order to prevent disturbance of Jewish mass graves in Sobibór, non-invasive methods such as Ground Penetrating Radar survey, topographical surveying and low attitude aerial photography were employed since 2007.<sup>70</sup> But this approach was not widely adopted across the site.

Another category of sites where an archaeological approach was employed are those related to PoWs. Investigations of Soviet crimes against Polish soldiers and officers in **Katyn, Kharkiv, Starobil'sk** (led by M. Głosek in 1994-1995) gave a rationale for the forthcoming study of PoW camps in the Western part of Poland: **Gross Born (Borne Sulinowo)** and **Nadarzyce (Rederitz)** – led by Koła in 2002-2004, **Luft III Sagan (Żagań)** led by Doyle, Babitsa and Pringle in 2003 and Pollard in 2004. These case studies focused on the investigation of camp structures and camp cemeteries. Research questions concentrated on the identification of the approximate number of victims buried at the camp cemeteries through the use of archaeological excavation, geophysical surveys and oral witness testimonies analysis.<sup>71</sup>

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69 Bem, M and Mazurek, W. (2012). *Sobibór. Badania archeologiczne na terenie po byłym niemieckim ośrodku zagłady w Sobiborze w latach 2000–2011*, Warszawa—Włodawa, p. 88.

70 Gilead, I., Haimi, Yo. And Mazurek, W. (2009), p. 31; Freund, R. (2019) *The Archaeology of the Holocaust: Vilna, Rhodes, and Escape Tunnels*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, pp. 89-92.

71 Stromski, M. (2014) 'Archeologia internowania na wybranych przykładach badań byłych niemieckich obozów zagłady na ziemiach polskich'. *Argumenta Historica. Czasopismo Naukowo-Dydaktyczne*, 1, pp. 125-140.

This is not a complete list of case studies where archaeological approach was employed, but this section shows some of the main scenarios for the application of these methodologies since the 1940s until the early 2000s.

### 2.2.3. The “Forensic turn”

#### *2.2.2.1. Forensic archaeology and legal proceedings*

Forensic archaeology first appeared in the United States in the late 1970s and then developed in the United Kingdom, Northern Europe (particularly in the Netherlands), and Australia. It is widely accepted that this sub-discipline can be defined as “the application of archaeological theory and methods to the resolution of medico-legal and humanitarian issues”.<sup>72</sup> Initially, forensic archaeology was used by police forces to assist in the search for the bodies of missing individuals (for instance, in the UK, the first application of forensic archaeology saw specialists involved in searching for the body of 3-year-old Stephen Jennings in 1988).<sup>73</sup> However, the roots of applying archaeological methods for forensic investigation have origins as far back as the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>74</sup>

Since the 1980s, archaeological methods have been more widely applied to the investigation of genocides and mass conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century beyond the Holocaust and Nazi crimes. Forensic archaeological techniques were utilized in investigations of mass murders in former

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<sup>72</sup> *Scientific Working group for Forensic Anthropology* (2013) *Age Estimation*. Available at: [https://www.nist.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2018/03/13/swganth\\_age\\_estimation.pdf](https://www.nist.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2018/03/13/swganth_age_estimation.pdf). Accessed: 15 December 2022).

NB: Forensic archaeology relates to different fields of knowledge depending upon the country. For instance, in the USA forensic archaeology and physical anthropology are considered a subfield of anthropology, but in the UK and some other countries, they are a separate discipline of forensic science: Sturdy Colls, C. (2015). *Holocaust Archaeologies*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> Hunter, J. (2002) ‘Foreword. A pilgrim in forensic archaeology—a personal view’, in W. Haglund and M. Sorg (Eds.). *Advances in Forensic Taphonomy: Method, Theory, and Archaeological Perspectives*. CRC Press, p. XXV; Hunter, J and Cox, M. (2005) *Forensic archaeology: a textbook*, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Blau, S. (2004) ‘Forensic Archaeology in Australia: Current Situations, Future Possibilities’, *Australian Archaeology*, 58, p. 11.

Yugoslavia<sup>75</sup>; Rwanda<sup>76</sup>; South Africa<sup>77</sup>; Armenia<sup>78</sup>; South America<sup>79</sup>; Spain<sup>80</sup>; and other locations around the world.<sup>81</sup> These investigations assisted in the development of new, more rigorous methodologies that can aid in searches for persons killed during genocide and conflict. However, Wright argued that even the application of forensic archaeology for the investigation of mass graves does not always bring current information for prosecution or victim identification, but rather it assists with the reconstruction of an event(s).<sup>82</sup> This means that forensic archaeology focuses on the specifics of body deposition practices and the location (and possible recovery) of a corpse(s). It may provide information that can aid in the

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<sup>75</sup> Bergholz, M. (2014) 'As if nothing ever happened:' Massacres, Missing Corpses, and Silence in a Bosnian Community', in E. Anstett, and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds), *Destruction and Human Remains. Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 15–45; Jugo, A. and Wastell, S. (2015) 'Disassembling the pieces, reassembling the social: the forensic and political lives of secondary mass graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina', in E. Anstett and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds) *Human Remains and Identification: Mass violence, genocide, and the 'forensic turn'*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 142–174; Jugo, A. and Wagner, S. (2017) 'Memory politics and forensic practices: exhuming Bosnia and Herzegovina's missing persons.', Z. in Dziuban,(ed.) *Mapping the 'forensic turn': engagements with materialities of mass death in Holocaust studies and beyond*. Vienna: New Academic Press, pp. 195-241.

<sup>76</sup> Korman, R. (2014) 'The Tutsi body in the 1994 genocide: ideology, physical destruction, and memory', in E. Anstett, and J.-M. Dreyfus (Eds.) *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 226–242; Korman, R. (2015) 'Bury or display? The politics of exhumation in post-genocide Rwanda' in E. Anstett and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds) *Human Remains and Identification: Mass violence, genocide, and the 'forensic turn'*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 203–220.

<sup>77</sup> Rousseau, N. (2015) 'Identification, politics, disciplines Missing persons and colonial skeletons in South Africa', in E. Anstett and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds) *Human Remains and Identification: Mass violence, genocide, and the 'forensic turn'*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 204–225; Rousseau, N. (2014) 'Death and dismemberment The body and counter-revolutionary warfare in apartheid South Africa', in E. Anstett and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds) *Destruction and Human Remains. Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 175–202.

<sup>78</sup> Kévorkian, R. (2014) 'Earth, fire, water: or how to make the Armenian corpses disappear', in E. Anstett, and J.-M. Dreyfus, (Eds.) *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 89–116; Ferllini, R.(2016) 'The Armenian Genocide: Forensic Intervention, Narrative, and the Historical Record' In *Excavating memory: Material Culture Approaches to Sites of Remembering and Forgetting*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, pp. 357–375.

<sup>79</sup> Ranalletti, M. (2014) 'When death is not the end Towards a typology of the treatment of corpses of 'disappeared detainees' in Argentina from 1975 to 1983', in E. Anstett and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds) *Destruction and Human Remains. Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 146–180. Mazz, J. (2015) 'The concealment of bodies during the military dictatorship in Uruguay (1973–84)', in E. Anstett, and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds), *Human Remains and Identification: Mass violence, genocide, and the 'forensic turn'*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 83–97; Garibian, S. (2014) Seeking the dead among the living Embodying the disappeared of the Argentinian dictatorship through law', in J.-M. Dreyfus, and E. Anstett (eds). *Human Remains and Violence. Methodological Approaches*. Manchester University Press, pp. 44–55.

<sup>80</sup> Ferrandiz, F. (2013) 'Exhuming the defeated: Civil War mass graves in 21st-century Spain', *American Ethnologist*, 40(1), pp. 38–54; Colaert, L. (2016). 'Excavating a hidden past:' The forensic turn in Spain's collective memory', in M. Starzmann, and J. Roby (eds.) *Excavating memory: Material Culture Approaches to Sites of Remembering and Forgetting*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, pp. 336–356.

<sup>81</sup> Hunter, J. and Sturdy-Colls, C. (2013). 'Forensic Archaeology', in J. Siegel, G. Knuffler and P. Saukko *Encyclopaedia of Forensic Sciences*. 3rd edition. London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 18-23.

<sup>82</sup>Wright, R. (2010) 'Where are the Bodies? In the Ground' *The Public Historian*, 32(1), p.97.

prosecution of offenders or the identification of a victim, but the latter is often the focus of other specialists.

#### 2.2.2.2. Humanitarian perspectives of the “forensic turn”

At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a movement in humanitarian science that can be described as "return to things" or "turn to nonhuman".<sup>83</sup> Likewise, at a conference in Paris in 2012, Van Pelt formulated a proposal outlining the necessity of a "forensic turn" for studying extreme violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>84</sup> This “turn” emerged in part as a result of new understandings of the principles and applicability of forensic science from a humanitarian point of view. Additionally, the rationale for larger engagement of forensic approach is the desire and the initiative of relatives and the community to learn the fate of their beloved, including their places of burial. Another key factor is the desire to not have one’s loved ones be interred within a mass grave created by the perpetrators themselves.<sup>85</sup> Hence, the traditional definition of *forensic* is no longer only seen as being applicable only to legal proceedings.

Complementing archaeological approaches, in the past two decades, the "forensic turn" has impacted almost all areas of humanitarian science leading to new insights into mass violence. For instance, new meanings and understandings are being gained from photographs:

"the genre of aftermath photography exploring the topography of sites of conflicts is well established, with its emphasis on the landscape of violence and trauma and the hidden memories they can trigger".<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Domanska, E. (2006). 'The material presence of the past', *History and Theory, Volume 45, Issue 3*, p. 338.

<sup>84</sup> Anstett, E. and Dreyfus J.-M. (2015) 'Introduction', in E. Anstett, and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds) *Human Remains and Identification: Mass violence, genocide, and the 'forensic turn'*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2016) "'Earth conceal not my blood": forensic and archaeological approaches to locating the remains of Holocaust victims', in J.-M. Dreyfus, and E. Anstett (eds.) *Human remains in society: Curation and exhibition in the aftermath of genocide and mass—violence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 163–196.

<sup>86</sup> Lowe, P. (2018) 'Traces of Traces: Time, Space, Objects, and the Forensic Turn in Photography', *Humanities* 7, no. 3: 76, p. 6.

Additionally, evidence can be drawn from various architectural forms and their impressions: drawings, models, aerial and ground-level photos, videos, sketches, plans.<sup>87</sup> Some studies also highlight the *spatial turn* which is somewhat similar in its aims to *forensic turn*, whereby studies reassess the meaning of landscape and the surrounding environment.<sup>88</sup> Anstett and Dreyfus suggest looking at the *forensic turn* as both the cause and the effect of a revisional paradigm shift in remembrance.<sup>89</sup> The meaning of a *site* also changes and a concept of "forensic monument" is introduced to denote a site of commemoration not only by the construction of monuments but by the presence of *bioenvironmental agents*.<sup>90</sup> For instance, Sendyka suggested an entirely different method of the commemoration of *non-sites of memory* that was based on the idea that a commemorative role can be played by not just specifically created traditional monuments, but also space itself and objects related to the Holocaust that are contained within in (including human remains).<sup>91</sup>

### 2.2.2.3. A brief overview of significant forensic projects in Holocaust studies

As a result of the *forensic turn*, the scientific community began to take an interest once again in the material evidence of the Holocaust and view it from different perspectives. The Irving v Penguin Books Ltd in 2000 became one of the first trials of Holocaust revisionists (in that case British author Irving) against scholars (in that case publisher and academic Lipstadt).<sup>92</sup>

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87 Wieszman, E. (2014) 'Introduction' in E. Wieszman (Ed.) *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*. Berlin: Sternberg, p.13.

88 Małczyński, J., et al. (2020) 'The Environmental History of the Holocaust', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 22, 2pp. 183-196; Yevstafiyeva, T. and Nahmanovich, V. (2004) 'Syrets, Lukianovka I Babii Yar v pervoi polovine XX v. (do nachala nemetskoj okkupatsii 1941-1943 gg.)' in T. Yevstafiyeva, D. Malakov, and V. Nahmanovich *Babii Yar: chelovek, vlast', istoriya*. Book 1, pp.66-83; Cole T. (2016) *Holocaust Landscapes*, London: Bloomsbury Academic; Beorn, W., et al. (2009). Geographies of the Holocaust. *Geographical Review*, 99. (4), pp.563-574; Beorn, W. W., Knowles, A. K., & Steiner, E. B. (2014) Killing on the Ground and in the Mind: The Spatialities of Genocide in the East. In A. K. KNOWLES, T. COLE, & A. GIORDANO (Eds.), *Geographies of the Holocaust*. Indiana University Press.

89 Anstett, E. and Dreyfus, J.-M. (2015) p. 6-7.

90 Dziuban, Z. (2017) 'Introduction: Forensics in the Expanded Field', in Z. Dziuban (ed.), *Mapping the 'Forensic Turn': The Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, Vienna: New Academic Press, p. 32.

91 Sendyka, R. (2013) 'Scopic Regimes and Modernity: Hypotyposis', in D. Koczanowicz, L. Koczanowicz, and D. Schauffler (Eds.) *Discussing Modernity. A Dialogue with Martin Jay*, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi; Sendyka, R. (2017) 'Posthuman Memorialisations. Memorials After the Forensic Turn', in Z. Dziuban (ed.), *Mapping the 'Forensic Turn': The Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, Vienna: New Academic Press, pp. 291-307.

92 Guttenplan, D. (2001) *The Holocaust on trial*. New York: Norton.

Attention was focused on Auschwitz and a precedent when forensic evidence was involved.<sup>93</sup> Forensic architect, Van Pelt created a 700-page report based on examination and cross-examination of evidence of the gas chambers at **Auschwitz**. An analysis of drawings, blueprints and building remains (gas chambers and crematoriums), images and photos were used to confirm the existence and operation of these building for genocidal purposes.

Another remarkable example of the legal investigation on Holocaust sites was the archaeological excavation in **Jedwabne** in Poland (2001). This was a pragmatic response by the Polish authorities (Polish Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN)) regarding new information about the tragic events in this village in 1941 that were documented in Jan Gross' book "Sąsiedzi/Neighbours".<sup>94</sup> The purpose of the archaeological investigation was to determine the number of victims in the mass grave.<sup>95</sup> This investigation was quickly suspended and a full exhumation was not carried out. The exhumation was conducted for five days instead of several months and was ended because of protests of Jewish religious activists. The Polish government agreed to a compromise solution and only the top layer of graves was examined. As a result, the existence of mass graves was confirmed, but an accurate number of bodies could not be estimated.

From a humanitarian perspective, Sturdy Colls argued that archaeological data has the potential to not only complement, but to also supplement historical or other types of sources: she has advocated the creation of a sub-discipline of Holocaust Archaeology because of the potential benefits of the investigation of physical evidence.<sup>96</sup> Over the last two decades in particular, the methodological advances in Holocaust Archaeology have been developed specifically to assist with the locating and recording of sites, and (re-) presentation of the physical evidence of the Holocaust.<sup>97</sup>

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93 Keren, D., McCarthy, J. Mazal, H. W. (2004) 'The Ruins of the Gas Chambers: A Forensic Investigation of Crematoriums at Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18(1), pp. 68-103; Keren, D., McCarthy, J. Mazal, H. W. (2004) 'The Ruins of the Gas Chambers: A Forensic Investigation of Crematoriums at Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18(1), pp. 68-103.

94 Gross, J. T. (2001) *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>95</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) p. 33.

<sup>96</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2012) *Holocaust archaeology: archaeological approaches to landscapes of Nazi genocide and persecution*. University of Birmingham. Ph.D thesis, p. 440.

<sup>97</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) p. 349.

In other words, forensic archaeological research undertaken at former Holocaust sites has been shown to provide tangible evidence (human remains, personal belongings, building remains related to the Holocaust such as gas chambers, barracks) or ascertain details such as the locations of killing sites, victim routes, camp boundaries.<sup>98</sup> All of these findings could be used for criminal proceedings (as direct evidence of Holocaust events). However, the number of cases where forensic archaeological methods can be applied for research or humanitarian reasons becomes more evident every year. Certainly, the number of publications based on applying forensic archaeological methods and approaches to Holocaust studies is continuously increasing. Most focus on concentration, labour and death camps, although a few examples relating to killing and burial sites elsewhere are emerging (see below).<sup>99</sup>

A notable and comprehensive project which demonstrated the effectiveness of forensic archaeological approaches was achieved by Sturdy Colls and Colls within the **Treblinka campscape** since 2010.<sup>100</sup> The archaeological team conducts their research using predominantly non-invasive technology such as geophysical and topographic survey methods. Their approach confirmed the presence of mass graves in the Treblinka extermination camp and the remains of the Old Gas Chambers, and went on to employ forensic excavation, which verified the geophysical data. As a result of a LiDAR survey in a wooded area and following minimally invasive excavation in 2013, Sturdy Colls' team also identified locations of several unknown mass graves at an execution site close to the Treblinka labour camp. Sturdy Colls'

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<sup>98</sup> Bevan, B. (1994) *A case to answer: The story of Australia's first European war crimes prosecution*. Cambridge: Wake- field Press ; Sturdy Colls, C. (2015).

<sup>99</sup>Hirte, R. (2000) *Offene Befunde. Ausgrabungen in Buchenwald. Zeitgeschichtliche Archäologie und Erinnerungskultur*. Braunschweig; Ibel, J. (2002) 'Konzentrationslager Flossenbürg: Ausgrabungen und Funde', *Das Archäologische Jahr in Bayern*, pp. 147-149; Schute, I. (2018) 'Collecting Artifacts on Holocaust Sites: A Critical review of Archaeological Research in Ybenheer, Westerbork, and Sobibor', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 22, pp. 593–613; Anderson Stamnes, A. (2013) *Geophysical survey at the Second World War Prison Camp at Falstad, Ekne in Levanger Municipality, Norway*. Available at: [http://falstadsenteret.no/arrangement/2013/recall/filer/Geophysical\\_survey\\_report\\_Falstad.pdf](http://falstadsenteret.no/arrangement/2013/recall/filer/Geophysical_survey_report_Falstad.pdf). (Accessed on: 11 November 2021); Sturdy Colls, C. and Colls, K. (2022) *Adolf Island: The Nazi Occupation of Alderney*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

<sup>100</sup>Sturdy Colls, C. (2012) 'O tym, co minelo, lecz nie zostalo zapomniane. Badania archeologiczne na terenie bylego obozu zaglady w Treblince', *Zaglada Zydow. Studia i Materialy*, 8, pp. 77—112; Sturdy Colls, C. and Colls, K. (2020) 'The Heart of Terror: A Forensic and Archaeological Assessment of the Old Gas Chambers at Treblinka', in P. Vareka, and J. Symonds *Archaeologies of Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, and Repression: Dark Modernities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

investigation provided the solution concerning how to maintain high professional standards of archaeological research whilst protecting human remains from disturbance according to the Jewish religious principles.<sup>101</sup>

At the time of writing, the most significant project focused on genealogies, representations and interpretations of campsites in different parts of Europe in **“Accessing Campsites: Inclusive Strategies for Using European Conflicted Heritage” (iC-ACCESS)**. This project was funded by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) and the European Union’s Horizon 2000, which, in 2016-2019, consolidated academics’ efforts from different European Universities. Archaeology, forensic investigation, geography and digital humanities participated in achieving the aim of this project “to locate, record and digitally preserve the landscape of mass violence”.<sup>102</sup> Various sites across Europe were selected for investigation: Treblinka camps in Poland, Falstad camp in Norway, Westerbork / Moluccan camp in the Netherlands, Bergen-Belsen camp in Germany, the Jachymov Mines and Lety camp in the Czech Republic, and Jasenovac camp complex in Croatia. The approaches suggested by iC-ACCESS’ international team at various sites across Europe provided a new strategy of dealing with heritage sites that have a heavy legacy. They also proposed a solution to finding a balance between conducting investigations while sticking to the proper principles and methodology, memorialization of various categories of victims, and preservation of vulnerable and contested heritage sites.

As well as an increase in the number of forensic investigations, many countries across the world have begun to preserve and protect these sites and change cultural heritage legislation, often based on the findings of the aforementioned field campaigns.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2013) ‘The Archaeology of the Holocaust.’ *British Archaeology* 130, pp. 50-53.

<sup>102</sup> Research ROUTES - Accessing Campsites (2016). Available at: Campsites.com.(Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

<sup>103</sup> Moshenska, G. (2013) ‘Conflict’, in A. Piccini, R. Harrison, P. Graves-Brown (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p. 352.



This brief overview of the previous investigations does not cover all projects, but instead presents an evolution of medico-legal investigation in Holocaust studies. More details on the history of forensic archaeology are presented in a broad range of academic publications.<sup>104</sup>

### **2.3. Mass grave investigation in Ukraine**

In the past seven decades, archaeological investigations have not played a vital role in Holocaust studies in Ukraine. Research has tended to focus on reviewing historical documents or oral history sources rather than physical evidence. Only a few studies have employed an archaeological approach partially or completely for Holocaust studies in Ukraine.

#### 2.3.1. Forensic archaeology in Ukraine

Even though forensic archaeological approaches for Holocaust studies in Ukraine have not been widely adopted, some methods belonging to this discipline have been used in certain cases. The first studies in Ukraine were conducted in 1990 by Wright's team in **Serniki** (Rivne region).<sup>105</sup> Forensic archaeologists were employed to provide expertise in the Polyukhovich v The Commonwealth trial (also known as the War Crimes Act Case) in 1991. Ivan Polyukhovich was charged and allegedly committed the mass murder of Jewish people in Serniki village in 1942-1943. The legal-archaeological excavation confirmed the existence of mass graves, and Wright's team estimated the number of victims in graves and the dimensions. That data was compared with eyewitness testimonies from local men and confirmed with some discrepancies:

"His recollection led the archaeological team to the grave, which turned out to contain some 550 bodies and not the 800 he had estimated. The grave was also some 10 m shorter than he said".<sup>106</sup>

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104 Buchli, V. and Lucas, V. (2001) *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*. London, pp. 3-7, Powers, N. and Sibun, L. (2013) 'Forensic Archaeology', in P. Graves-Brown, H. Rodney and A. Piccini (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*. Oxford Academic, pp. 40-52; Dziuban, Z. (2017) pp. 7-38; Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) pp.29-31.

<sup>105</sup> Hunter, J. and Cox, M. (2005) pp. 144-158.

<sup>106</sup> Wright, R. (2010) p. 99.

This forensic archaeological expertise was part of the criminal proceedings that affected the selection of the appropriate methods for the investigation and information required for the trial. The Wright investigation also exposed an important limitation of the use of archaeological methods in Holocaust studies. Despite the high standards of evidence collection, forensic archaeology cannot conclusively prove or deny the involvement of an individual in a crime; in other words, archaeology does not provide an answer to the question of who pulled the proverbial or actual trigger.<sup>107</sup> The *Polyukhovich v The Commonwealth* trial became a highly public case which, also brought its own pressures on the experts.

In recent years, the application of non-invasive techniques has become a more common approach to fieldwork at Holocaust sites and this has been the case during a number of examples in Ukraine. All of these projects have been conducted by international teams. For example, the Centre of Archaeology of Staffordshire University, led by Sturdy Colls and Colls, has carried out several investigations in Ukraine as part of two major initiatives: the **Rohatyn Heritage Project** (Ivano-Frankivsk region), and the **Protecting Memory Project** (Vinnitsia and Zhytomyr regions).<sup>108</sup> The methodology applied at these investigations drew inspiration from the Centre's previous projects including the Holocaust Landscape Project – a European-wide programme of research which conducted work in several European countries including: “Staro Sajmište: the Living Death Camp Project” in Serbia, “Alderney archaeology and Heritage” in the United Kingdom and “Finding Treblinka” in Poland.<sup>109</sup> The key component for both projects was adherence to rabbinical standards in order to respect religious laws whilst determining site boundaries and the locations of mass graves. The Centre of the Archaeology team follows guidelines set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIFA, the governing body for our field) . The Protecting Memory Project was a cross-European collaboration which undertook desk-based research prior to the fieldwork in order to narrow down the search areas and provide context for data interpretation.

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107 O'Donnel, P. (2018) 'A Gateway to Hell': A Nazi Mass Grave, Australian Forensic Scientists, and a 50 Year—Old Murder', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 32(3), pp. 380-382.

108 *Rohatyn Jewish Heritage* (web page) Available at: <https://rohatynjewishheritage.org/en/projects/mass—grave—memorials/> Accessed: 15 December 2022); *Protecting memory project*. (Web page).

<sup>109</sup> Holocaust Landscape Project (2019).

The case study methodology of the Centre of Archaeology was based on the ground conditions of each site and previous investigation experience across Europe. The most appropriate methods were then selected the locations, such as, Forensic Walkover survey, Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) and Global Positioning System Survey (details of each method described in Chapter 3).<sup>110</sup> The selection of methods allowed the identification of an accurate location for mass graves and respected ethical considerations. The general aim of The Protecting Memory Project was the memorialisation of Holocaust sites in certain places. Determining the boundaries of mass graves was a requirement for legal procedures to obtain protective status and the proviso to any construction works on the site. The archaeological data was vital in securing permission to undertake this work. However, because non-invasive techniques have some limitations (described in the following chapters), the presence of human remains was not clear in some cases. But on a number of the sites, a significant amount of human remains were found on the surface through looting and animal activity. At one site, forensic archaeological excavation, in the form of test pits, was employed to confirm the presence of a pit-like feature which demonstrated the characteristics of graves that archaeologists have identified elsewhere (Plyskiv, Vinnytsia region); this approach was necessary since non-invasive methods were unable to conclusively prove whether a grave was present.<sup>111</sup> It should be stated that the Protecting Memory Project conception was based, wherever possible, on the involvement of Ukrainian-based companies. However, that was "limited [to] the use of [Ukrainian] firms with more highly developed scanning procedures related to mass grave sites".<sup>112</sup> In other words, there are no local companies in Ukraine today that conduct this type of research on a professional level. The involvement of the Centre of Archaeology team made it possible, in some cases, such as Khazhyn and Kholodianka in Zhytomyr region to clarify mass grave location or redesign memorials using archaeological data (for example, two possible mass graves instead of one were identified in Barashi Zhytomyr region). To summarise, the Centre's work confirmed the presence of at least one mass grave

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110 The Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University and EMC Radar Consulting, (2017) *A programme of non—invasive forensic investigation of possible mass graves sites in the Vinnitsia and Zhytomir region, Ukraine*, p. 4.

111 The Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University and EMC Radar Consulting, (2017), p. 14-18.

112 Berger, D. (2015) 'Protecting Memory: Preserving and Memorializing the Holocaust Mass Graves of Eastern Europe', in International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance *Killing Sites*. Berlin: Metropol Verlag, p. 101.

at all but one of the sites and provided data to assist with the design of memorials and the legal procedures.

The general methodological aspects described were also employed for the Rohatyn Jewish heritage investigation. The aim of this project is promotion and preservation of Jewish heritage in small Ukrainian town Rohatyn in Western Ukraine. The team of the Centre of Archaeology participated in the Mass Grave Memorials Project.<sup>113</sup> The results of non-invasive archaeological surveys in 2017 and 2019 on two wartime mass graves sites (North and South Mass graves) provides more accurate information about burial place locations. In addition, the archaeological survey confirmed the possible absence of a wartime mass grave in another location - a Jewish cemetery. The information that was obtained helped determine further use of these territories; specifically, where and what kind of construction work was possible in order to preserve and to commemorate the burials.

Geophysical techniques were also employed during an investigation in **Railivka** in Lviv region in 2010 led by Bondar', **Bryukhovychi, Lviv, Biligorshcha** in Lviv region in 2014 led by Fletcher and Enright.<sup>114</sup> However, although archaeological data was compared with aerial photos and pre-war/wartime maps, archival sources were not used. Historical maps and aerial photos are a significant source for Holocaust studies, but digital data interpretation requires a desk-based investigation for an accurate result. Issues related to correct data (archaeological and geophysical) reading provoked the central research questions of this thesis.

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113 The Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University Rohatyn report (2017) *Non—invasive archaeological research to define the boundaries of WWII sites in Rohatyn, Ukraine*; The Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University 2020) *Non—invasive archaeological research to define the boundaries of WWII sites in Rohatyn, Ukraine*.

114 Chetverikov, B, et al (2015) 'Determination of location of the historical objects using photogrammetric methods and methods of non—destructive ground research', *Geodesy, cartography and aerial photography*. Volume 85. pp. 94—103; Geoscope Services Limited UK (2014) *Ukraine – Mass Grave research Lviv oblast region report on geophysical surveys and annexes*.

### 2.3.2. Other approaches to Holocaust sites in Ukraine

In contrast with the section above, this section focuses on projects that have not followed forensic investigation standards. There will be examples further down on the main strategies that were employed for an archaeological approach for Holocaust studies in Ukraine.

After the Holocaust and extensive Jewish emigration from Ukraine since the 1980s, the Jewish community almost disappeared from Ukrainian towns and villages. Alongside antisemitic practice during the Soviet era, these were the reasons why Jewish culture vanished and was abandoned. However, a number of projects related to Jewish immobile cultural heritage (cemeteries, synagogues, and other religious buildings) took place after the Independence of Ukraine in 1991 such as **the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of American's Heritage Abroad projects, European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative surveys, and the Heritage Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries.**<sup>115</sup> These projects reflect a wider trend in Europe and the USA in terms of people wanting to know more about their Jewish heritage. Furthermore, after Ukraine obtained Independence, the Ukrainian archives and sites connected to Jewish heritage became more open for researchers and former Ukrainian Jews successors.<sup>116</sup>

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115 *Jewish Cemeteries, Synagogues and Mass graves in Ukraine.* (2005) Available at: [https://jewishheritageguide.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/uscpaha\\_jewish\\_survey\\_ukraine\\_2005.pdf](https://jewishheritageguide.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/uscpaha_jewish_survey_ukraine_2005.pdf) (Accessed on 16 December 2022); *International Jewish Cemetery Project* (web page) Available at: <http://iajgscemetery.org/eastern—europe/ukraine/>. (Accessed: 15 December 2022); *European Jewish cemeteries initiative. Surveys. Ukraine.* (2016-2018) Available at: [https://e.issuu.com/embed.html?backgroundColor=%2384243c&backgroundColorFullscreen=%2384243c&d=esjf\\_pilot\\_project\\_ukraine\\_2018-2020\\_&hideIssuuLogo=true&u=esjf](https://e.issuu.com/embed.html?backgroundColor=%2384243c&backgroundColorFullscreen=%2384243c&d=esjf_pilot_project_ukraine_2018-2020_&hideIssuuLogo=true&u=esjf) (Accessed: 15 December 2022); *Heritage Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries* (web page) Available at: <https://hfpjc.com/cemeteries>. (Accessed: 15 December 2022); *Epigraphic expedition of Ukrainian Association for Jewish studies to Kalush in Western Ukraine* (2019). Available at: <https://vaadua.org/news/epigrafichna-ekspediciya-doslidila-ievreyske-kladovishche-na-prikarpatti> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022).

116 *Catalogue Historic Synagogue in Europe* (web page) Available at: <https://www.frh-europe.org/discover-historic-synagogues-europe-project-foundation-jewish-heritage/> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021); *Catalogue of Wall Paintings in Central and East European Synagogue* (web page) Available at: <https://cja.huji.ac.il/wpc/browser.php?mode=main> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021); Kravtsov, S. (2017) *Synagogues in Ukraine: Volhynia*, Jerusalem: Center For Jewish Art. And Zalman Shazar Center.

In fact, pre-war everyday life in the Soviet Jewish communities in big cities and shtetls became essential objects of study since the late 1990s.<sup>117</sup> These projects represented an indirect starting point for an increased interest in Jewish culture and the Holocaust. They occasionally catalogued and created datasheets of Jewish mass graves and cemeteries in Ukraine or focused on independent case studies.<sup>118</sup> Data from these surveys not only provides approximate numbers of victims for each site but records site location and condition. The general purpose for all of these studies is to record and preserve Jewish heritage in Ukraine by employing different techniques and methods such as topographical surveys, excavation, remote surveying, although only a few have focused specifically on Holocaust sites in Ukraine.

One of the largest projects has been carried out by **Yahad-In Unum**.<sup>119</sup> Traditionally, this organisation uses a two-phase methodological approach: (1) archival research in the German Federal Justice Archives and a comparing of these with data of the Extraordinary Commission; (2) fieldwork investigations in one specific area (chosen after the first phase). The latter typically involves the collection of eyewitness testimonies (mostly different categories of bystanders such as people who lived near killing sites, curious witnesses, people who were forced into work at the time of the execution). Then, after interviewing, the investigative team and a witnesses attempt a reconstruction of the crime scene on the spot.<sup>120</sup> The team, together

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<sup>117</sup> Bemporad, E. (2013) *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk*. Indiana University Press; Veidlinger J. (2013) *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small—Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine*. Indiana University Press.

NB: The term "shtetl" means a locality that combines indications of the town and the village in Eastern Europe. Mostly shtetls inhabitants were Jewish. In shtetls, unlike villages, the population was not only engaged in agriculture, but there was a well-developed trade and craft as a permanent activity of a particular part of the population. Often in such shtetls, Jewish communities lived in isolation from representatives of other ethnic groups, preserving their culture, traditions, religion and language.

<sup>118</sup> *Jewish Cemeteries, Synagogues and Mass graves in Ukraine* (2005); *International Jewish Cemetery Project* (web page) Available at: <http://iajgscemetery.org/eastern—europe/ukraine/>. (Accessed: 15 December 2022); *European Jewish cemeteries initiative. Surveys. Ukraine*. (2016-2018); Len' Yu. (2018) *Opyt issledovaniya evreiskogo kladbischa g. Berdicheva: metodologiya opisaniya I issledovatel'skiye perspektivy*. Available at: <http://berdychiv.in.ua/%D0%BE%D0%BF%D1%8B%D1%82-%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B1%D0%B8/?lang=ru> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022).

<sup>119</sup> NB: Yahad-In Unum is the French-based voluntary organisation which focuses on the searching of mass grave locations and collecting eyewitness testimonies about the fate of Jewish community mostly in Eastern European countries.

<sup>120</sup> Desbois, P. (2015) 'Yahad – In Unum's Research of Mass Grave Sites of Holocaust Victims', in International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance *Killing Sites*. Berlin: Metropol Verlag, pp. 89-90.

with the witness, proceed to the alleged place of the killing site or mass grave and the witness describes what they recall, pointing at the reference objects, their viewing angle, where the victims and the perpetrators were in relation to them etc. During the last fifteen years, researchers have collected unique video archive of eyewitness testimonies and created one of the most complete maps with Holocaust mass graves locations in Ukraine (see Fig. 2.1.).

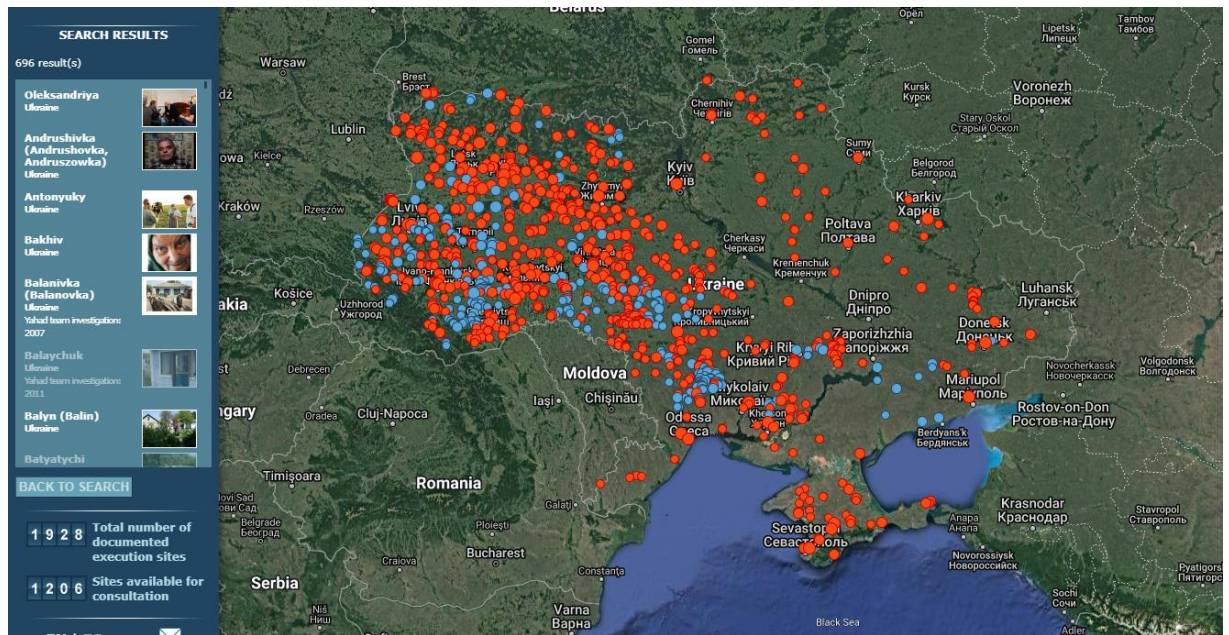


Fig. 2.1. A map of Jewish killing sites and mass graves in Ukraine, after Yahad-In Unum (2022).

One of the techniques employed by the Yahad-In Unum team is metal detector survey when searching for possible mass grave locations based on the Holocaust by bullets death mechanisms (in most cases – shooting). As proof of an exact location of a killing site or mass grave they would use an accumulation of bullets and/or shells that could potentially be left behind after an execution. According to Desbois, a metal detecting survey was engaged for the first time the Yahad-In Unum investigation in Khvativ (Lviv region) in 2006.<sup>121</sup>

Even though the value of data collected by the Yahad-In Unum team cannot be disputed, the approach used to get this data needs critical analysis. Eyewitness accounts alone, taken 70-80 years after the event, are not sufficient to accurately identify a mass grave's location.

<sup>121</sup> Desbois, P. (2011) *Khranytel' spogadiv. Kryvavymy slidamy Holokostu*. Kyiv: Dukh I Litera pp. 77-79.

Furthermore, bullet findings are not a definite confirmation for killing sites or mass graves. When considering this approach, it should be kept in mind that the whole territory of Ukraine was an arena for battles and partisan guerrillas which might explain the extent of bullet deposition. Another important concern is an absence of accurate recordings of artefacts. For example, the USHMM holds a collection of some Yahad-In Unum findings from Ukraine. One of the items is a shield-shaped shovel head (object 2010.443.43); it is unclear whether this was unearthed in Berdychiv (Zhytomyr region) or Khvativ (Lviv region) which are 300 km apart from each other.<sup>122</sup> It is also unclear whether these objects were discovered during walkover surveys or by metal detector searching. The lack of this critical information reduces the value of this object for conducting research studies and broke the general principle of Yahad-In Unum methodology:

"every piece of evidence or source of information can lead to a complete picture of the facts only when complemented by a diversity of other resources".<sup>123</sup>

It also stands in direct contrast to the rigorous methods forensic archaeologists employ. Due to lack of observation of methodological and scientific principles these artefacts cannot be used later on as physical evidence of genocide as they have lost a substantial portion of scientific information.

Other projects in Ukraine include excavations conducted on the **Teptiuzh** mountain in Lviv region led by Lazorak and Onischuk in 2013, and **Pushkarivskii Yar** in Poltava in 2019 by a search organisation (*poshukovtsi*) Soiuz Narodna pamiat'.<sup>124</sup> The number of these investigations led by poshukovtsi is considerably higher, but they are difficult to identify and analyse, since common practice for Ukraine is that excavations of wartime burials are not done

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<sup>122</sup> The USHMM collection (2020). a shield-shaped shovel head (object 2010.443.43). Available at: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn43139> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

<sup>123</sup> Desbois, P. (2013) 'The Witnesses of Ukraine or Evidence from the Ground: The Research of Yahad—In Unum', in *The Holocaust in Ukraine: New Sources and Perspectives*. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, p. 94.

<sup>124</sup> Lazorak, B. and Onischuk, Ya. (2015) 'NKVS chy GESTAPO?: Masove vbyvstvo tsyvil'nogo naselennia na gori Tepliu bilia Mlynok Shkil'nykovykh u lypni 1941 r. ta superechlyvi dzherel'ni svichennia', *Drogobyt'skyi krayeznavchyi zbirnyk*, Special issue 2, pp. 187-198; *U Pushkarivs'komu Yaru fakhivtsi z pohovan' ta istoryky provely poshukovi roboty* (2019). Available at: <https://pl.suspilne.media/news/30889>. (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).



by professionals, but by representatives of so-called search organisations. These are mostly volunteer organisations which focus on searching for missing soldiers and their further identification in former Soviet countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. The primary purpose of these searches is exhumation and reburial of the soldiers' remains and if possible, to identify them. For most cases, identification is possible only if their ID or soldiers' dog tags are found and are legible. The most frequently used method for achieving these goals is excavation. However, it is impossible to trace how the methodology was kept during this work. Even though searching for missing soldiers is a priority for such organisations, some participated in projects related to Holocaust victim searching whilst others came across them in the course of their work. This practice is still the most commonly used in Ukraine, and many graves of unknown soldiers have been identified. However, the main drawbacks for this approach are: (1) not following academic methodology for forensic archaeological fieldwork; (2) ignoring ethical and sensitivity concerns when dealing with genocide victims' burial sites; (3) the absence, in most of the cases, of accurate records which describe why, when and where the study had been conducted.

#### **2.4. Archaeological field projects and investigations of Holocaust sites in Ukraine**

Even though Yahad-In Unum predominantly focuses on gathering eyewitness testimonies (as described above), they also directed one of the largest investigations on Holocaust sites in Ukraine where archaeological excavation was employed. For this reason, the case study in Busk is critically analysed here in detail.

##### **2.4.1. Busk case study: Background**

Busk is located in what is presently defined as the Lviv region. In 1939, during the Soviet annexation in parts of the territory of Poland, Busk was incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR. On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1941, the town was occupied by the Nazis. About 1,900 Jews were living there at the time.<sup>125</sup> According to witness testimonies, the first killings of Jews took place immediately after the town was occupied. 28 Jews were selected, based on a list prepared in

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<sup>125</sup> *The USHMM encyclopedia* (2012). Vol. 2, Part A; p.768.

advance, and accused of sympathising with the Soviets.<sup>126</sup> The list contained some of the most respected members of Busk's Jewish community including Rabbi Abram Babad, gabbai (a person who assists in the synagogue services and/or be an assistant of a Rabbi) of Beth Midrash (a hall dedicated for Torah study) and Tenenbom. Victims were gathered at Mark Square and taken by car to a forest near Yablunika to be executed. In addition to the Jews, two non-Jewish Ukrainians were also killed.<sup>127</sup>

Soon after the occupation, a Jewish Council (*Judenrat*) was established, and Jewish inhabitants of Busk were required to mark their clothing with a blue Star of David (Magen David).<sup>128</sup> In August 1941, after establishing the German Civil Administration, Busk was incorporated into District Galizien as a part of Kreishauptmannschaft Kamionka-Strumilowa.<sup>129</sup> During the winter of 1941-1942, the Jewish population had suffered from malnutrition and cruelty from the Nazis. On Yom Kippur – the holiest day for Jews (21<sup>st</sup> of September 1942), a considerable mass execution was conducted in Busk. Germans, assisted by Ukrainian auxiliary police, selected 600-700 Jews unfit for labour and executed them next to Kamianka Strumylova (now Kamianka Buz'ka).<sup>130</sup> Following that, Jews from nearby villages were moved to Busk and, in December 1942, placed into a ghetto of over 2,000 people. The ghetto was created on two small streets and housed to 4,000 people.<sup>131</sup> Jews that died in the ghetto of starvation and ill-treatment were buried at the Jewish cemetery in mass graves.<sup>132</sup> Those who were capable of working were used as forced labour and transferred to labour camps. In January 1943, all patients of the Jewish hospital in the ghetto were executed. Additionally, on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1943, 1,200 ghetto prisoners were also executed at the Jewish cemetery. The remaining 300 inmates were transferred to Lviv to a camp on Janowska Street.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Shayari, A. (1965) *Sefer Busk : le-zekher ha-kehilah she-harevavh*. Israel: Irgun yots'e Busk be-Yiśra'el.

<sup>127</sup> *The USHMM encyclopedia* (2012). Vol. 2, Part A, p. 768.

<sup>128</sup> Shayari, A. (1965), p. 56.

<sup>129</sup> *The USHMM encyclopedia* (2012). Vol. 2, Part A, p. 768; NB: here used original names of administrative divisions in German.

<sup>130</sup> *The USHMM encyclopedia*. (2012). Vol. 2, Part A, p.768; Shayari, A. (1965), p. 57.

<sup>131</sup>Pohl, D. (1997) *Die Holocaust-Forschung und Goldhagens Thesen*. München: Oldenbourg , p. 257; Shayari, A. (1965) p.57.

<sup>132</sup> *The USHMM encyclopedia* (2012). Vol. 2, Part A, p.768.

<sup>133</sup> *The USHMM encyclopedia ....* (2012). Vol. 2, Part A, p. 769.

### 2.4.2. Archaeological investigation <sup>134</sup>

Between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2006, excavations were conducted at the site of the Jewish cemetery in Busk by a Communal association called the Memorial Society for Search of Victims of War in collaboration with Yahad-In Unum (Fig. 2.2). This was the site of the possible executions of the Jewish population of Busk during World War II. The proposed aims of the fieldwork were:

1. To conduct exhumation of burials.
2. To study bone fragments without disturbing their integrity, with the aim of establishing the nationality of victims, cause of death, and an approximate timeline of events and the number of victims in the grave.
3. To photographically document the process of investigation. <sup>135</sup>

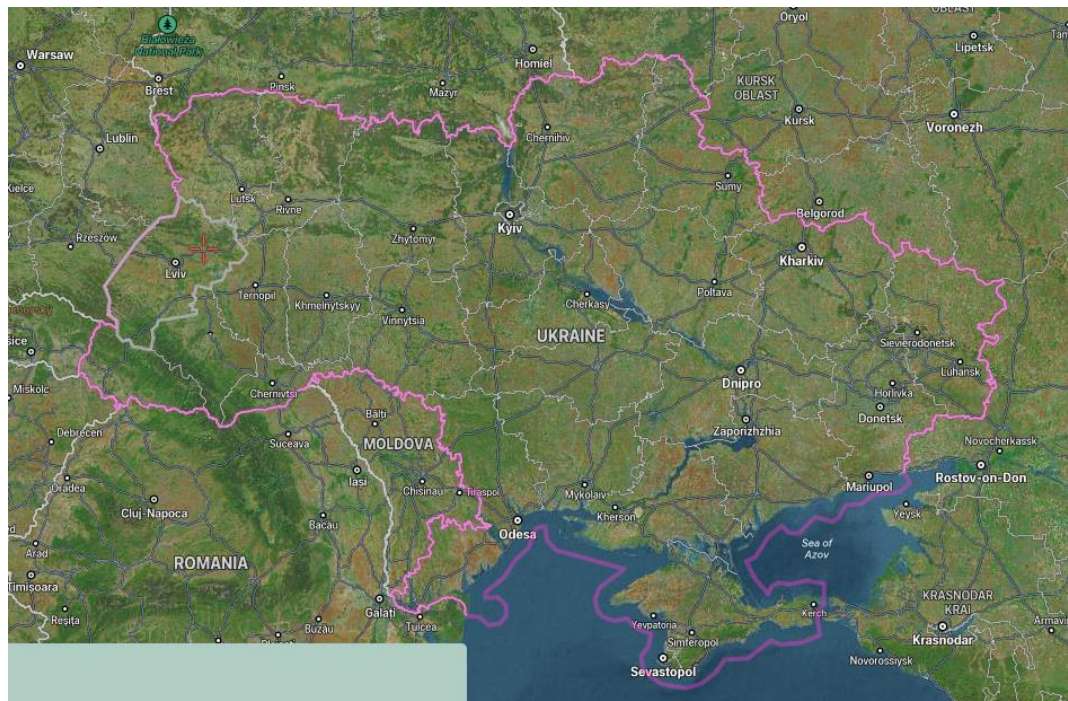


Fig. 2.2. Location of the Jewish cemetery in Busk. <sup>136</sup>

<sup>134</sup> NB: This part was made possible thanks to Yahad - In Unum's Fellowship Holocaust Young Scholars Workshop 2019.

<sup>135</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006) *Zvit pro provedennia poshukovo – doslidnytskykh robit na misti rozstriliv evreiskogo naseleattia v chasy Drugoi svitovoi viiny u m. Bus'k L'vivs'koi oblasti.*, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Satellites.pro map. Available at: <https://satellites.pro/>(Accessed on : 19 December 2022).

Despite the religious considerations, excavation at Busk went ahead. According to Father Desbois, permission was given by the Jewish authorities because the mass graves could be in danger from looting activities.<sup>137</sup> To follow Halakhic requirements for the duration of fieldwork, representatives of ZAKA (an Israeli non-profit organisation that assists Israeli government agencies in identifying and preparing victims of terror attacks or other similar incidents for burial) were present at the excavation site. This imposed significant restrictions on the archaeologists in terms of conducting an excavation; they were instructed to remove only the top layers of soil, not to disturb bones in any way, not to extract any objects or remains, and to analyse only the top layer of skeletons in multilayer burials.<sup>138</sup> It should be noted, however, that the invasive work that was permitted far exceeded that which was permitted in similar projects elsewhere in Ukraine and in Poland by Orthodox Rabbis; taking into consideration of their much stricter reading of Halakha.<sup>139</sup>

The investigation in Busk was designed as an archaeological excavation with the addition of metal detector surveys. Based on the archaeological report, it appears that the following steps were taken:

- Desk-based research, primarily based on sources of information from German and Soviet archives.
- Witness interviews (these steps were conducted by the Yahad-In Unum team).
- Visual inspection of the site which revealed 15 rectangular depressions where shootings allegedly took place (depth of 0,3<sup>140</sup>-0,5 m<sup>141 142</sup>) and which were assumed most likely to be mass graves.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Desbois, P. (2011) 181-182.

<sup>138</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006), p. 1-2.

<sup>139</sup> For examples, see Sturdy Colls, C. (2021) "For Dust Thou Art, and Unto Dust Shalt Thou Return": Jewish Law, Forensic Investigation, and Archaeology in the Aftermath of the Holocaust in S. Brown and S. Smith, *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Mass Atrocity, and Genocide*. London: Routledge, pp. 293-306.

<sup>140</sup> Pit 1.

<sup>141</sup> Pit 2.

<sup>142</sup> For other pits the depth is unknown.

<sup>143</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006), p 3.

- Excavation of burials "across the entire site"<sup>144</sup> All depressions (possible graves) were excavated using a traditional method of successive removal of layers of soil, followed by clearing of bone fragments with brushes, knives and trowels for recording and taking photos of the findings. Metallic rods were used to determine the depth of burial, perhaps, due to the inability to remove further layers above or within the remains due to Halakhic restrictions.
- Photography,
- Description of individual burials,
- Anthropological analysis,
- Stratigraphic description.

The results of the archaeological fieldwork (discovered graves), visual inspection of human remains (determining approximate sex, age, cause and manner of death) and an analysis of accompanying artefacts (shells and bullets, specific elements of clothing, jewellery, etc.) indicated who the victims were to verify witness testimonies.

Although this approach initially appears to represent a traditional archaeological methodology - based on a review of the archaeologists' report - several issues were observed. A critical analysis of these works allows common challenges in implementing invasive archaeological methods for Holocaust studies in Ukraine to be demonstrated.

### 2.4.3. Analysis of fieldwork results

The Busk case study illustrates a range of complex problems that archaeologists faced beyond those relating to Halakha, which also limited opportunities to complete comprehensive surveying of mass graves. According to the archaeologists themselves, the conditions for excavation were unfavourable due to the frequent flooding of burials<sup>145</sup>, poor preservation of bone fragments<sup>146</sup>, and multilevel layering of several burials. The team of archaeologists excavated 17 pits on the territory referred to, in the historical documents and eyewitness

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<sup>144</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006), p.3.

<sup>145</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006),p. 3.

<sup>146</sup>Onyschuk Ya. (2006), p. 8 pit 8 and pit 9.

testimonies as killing sites and mass grave locations (the area of the Old Jewish cemetery and partially area of the former Christian cemetery of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Table 2.1.). The existence of other burials in the same place raised another challenge for researchers: separating the Holocaust-related graves from ordinary burials. These circumstances had a significant impact not only on the process of excavation but also on the results.

Pit	Size of excavated area	Grave dimensions	Depth at which remains appeared	Number of skeletons
1	2.1m x 4.1 m	2 m x 2 m x 1.2 m	0.8 m	12
2	3.5 m x 4 m	2 m x 4 m x 1.8 (?) m	1 m	30 (skeletons laid in two layers, it seems, no soil layer was between).
3	4.1 m x 2.6 m; depth unknown	Unknown	0.8 m	32 (skeletons laid in three layers with layers of soil between them).
4	2.5 m x 2 m; depth unknown	Unknown	1 m	2
5	5 m x 3.2 m	3 m x 2 m x 1.4 m (?)	1.4 m	18
6	2.5 m x 2.5 m x 1.6 m	Unknown	0.7 m	14 (skeletons were laid in two layers, it seems, no soil layer was between). The area was flooded, and bone remains were preserved badly.
7	2 m x 7 m; depth unknown	Unknown	1.3 m	42 (possible some skeletons laid on top of others, possible two layers of human remains).
8	1.5 m x 3.5 m x 1.3 – 1.5 m	Unknown	1.1 m	22 (possible multilayer burial).
9	Length and width are unknown, depth 1 m	Unknown	Unknown	The area was flooded, and it was impossible to excavate this grave properly.
10	2 m x 8 m; depth unknown	Unknown	1.2 m	35 (2 of them were children).
11	Length and width are unknown, depth	Unknown	Unknown	Both these pits were excavated on the territory of the former Christian cemetery (now a private property). There were discovered Christian burials of the 16 <sup>th</sup> - 17 <sup>th</sup> centuries.
12	1 – 1,2 m	Unknown	Unknown	
13	2 m x 2.5 m x 1.6 m (?)	Unknown	1.2 m	11 (skeletons were laid in two layers with layers of soil between them).
14	2 m x 9 m x 1.5 m	Unknown	1.2 m	45 (possible multilayer burial). The area was flooded, and it was impossible to excavate this grave properly.
15	1.5 m x 2 m; depth unknown	Unknown	1.1 m	3

16	2 m x 9 m	Unknown	at 1.2 m and 1.6 m	They discovered two conglomerates of human remains in this pit: 16 a – 33 (adults) + 4 (children 4-10 years old) 16 b - no less than 16. This area also had a high level of soil moisture, and it made the process of excavation extremely difficult.
17	4 m x 11 m; depth unknown	Unknown	1 m	From 135 to 150 (18 of them were children).

*Table 2.1. Measurements and a possible number of individuals in each pit<sup>147</sup>, excavated during the fieldwork in Busk in 2006.<sup>148</sup>*

However, the gaps in this research appeared not only due to factors beyond the control of archaeologists. Information about the sizes of pits was not recorded thoroughly. Only in some cases is information about the size of the excavation grids and graves recorded (pits 1, 2, 5) (see Table 2.1). Although there was mention of stratigraphic analysis (of successive layers of soil), no drawings are available, except for a "plan of the location of pits with human remains" (Fig. 2.3). Therefore, it is not possible to draw any conclusions concerning the layers of grave fill in each pit. There were no drawings of actual burials either, making it impossible to determine exact sizes and other important details for event reconstruction. For example, pit 16 has two concentrations of bone fragments, but it is difficult to establish whether these were two separate pits or whether burials were created in the same pit but at different times.

It seems that the archaeologists focused on the bodies they discovered rather than providing a detailed analysis of the stratigraphic and discrete features present – a requirement of modern forensic archaeological recording at crime scenes and mass grave sites. Further analysis of aerial photos and the plan of excavations also showed that some of the pits were located along the same line (see Figs. 2.3 and Plate 2.1.). Since no evidence is presented which confirms whether these were individual pits, it is possible that they could have been part of a larger trench. Similarly, aerial photographs (Plate 2.1.) suggest that pits 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 13 and

<sup>147</sup> NB: all figures approximate, the counting was probably done using skulls since archaeologists were limited in their ability to move the remains around.

<sup>148</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006), p. 17.

16 contain small layers of darker soil in a clay-sand layer, but this is not captured in the report. Since these appear across a large area and have a similar pattern across all pits, it is likely that these layers represent natural floodplain alluvial deposits. However, a detailed stratigraphic description of them and their exact width and depth would have provided more detailed information on the cuts of the graves and their subsequent backfilling, as well as post-deposition landscape change. In addition, the report did not mention any vegetation change at the sites, even though this can be considered an important indicator when looking for probable burial sites.<sup>149</sup>

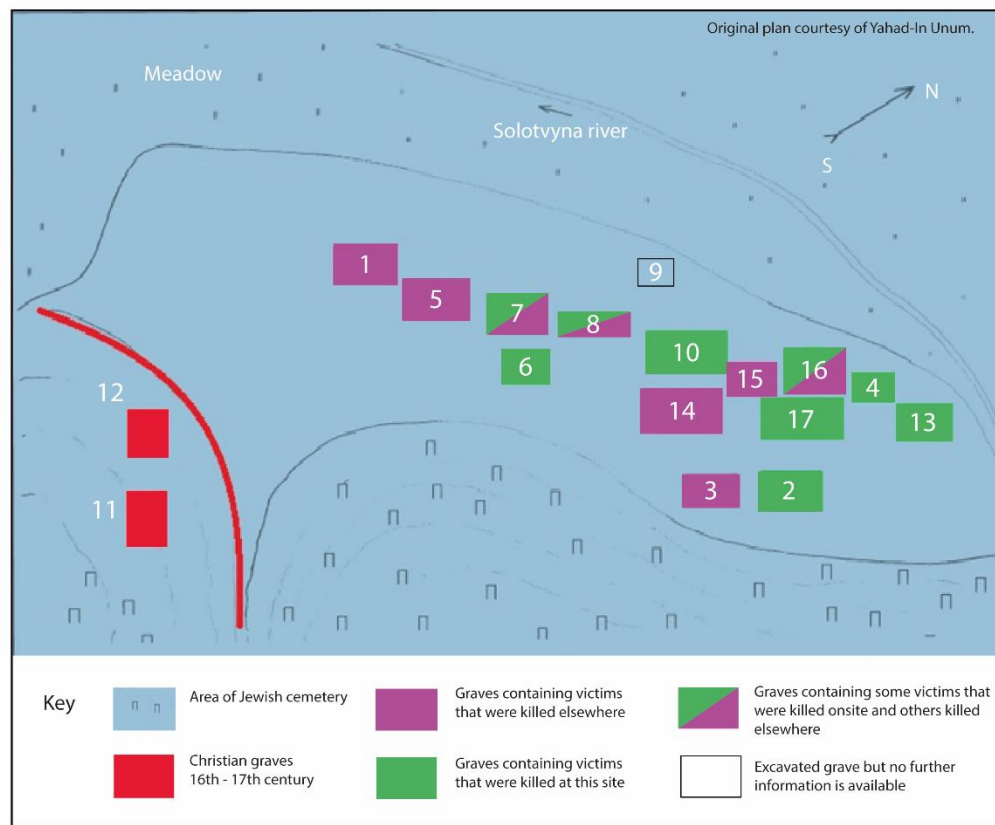


Fig. 2.3. Plan of an excavation area with labelled pits (base image Yahad-In-Unum) annotated with additional burial data (copyright Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University).

<sup>149</sup> For further information: Hunter, J. Cox, M. (2005) pp. 29-32; Hochrein, M. (2002) 'An Autopsy of the Grave: Recognizing, Collecting, and Preserving Forensic Geotaphonomic Evidence', in W. Haglund and M. Sorg. (Eds.) *Advances in Forensic Taphonomy: Method, Theory, and Archaeological Perspectives*. CRC Press, pp. 85-86; Damann, F. and Carter, D. (2010) 'Human Decomposition Ecology and Postmortem Microbiology', in J. Pokines and S. Symes (eds.) *Manual of Forensic Taphonomy*. CRC Press, pp. 37-49.





*Plate 2.1. Fieldwork in Busk, August 2006. Photograph courtesy of Yahad-In Unum.*

According to the report, the total number of buried remains in the excavated mass graves was 450-465, including 26 child skeletons.<sup>150</sup> Unfortunately, it is impossible to recognise how the figure given appeared since no details of any anthropological works appear in the Investigation

<sup>150</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006) p. 17. NB: The distinctions in the numbers occurred due to no accurate numbers of victims in pit 17.

Report.<sup>151</sup> This figure is far less than the anticipated number of victims based on the historical documents (see Background section above). Presumably, as the team of archaeologists did not excavate everything (following Halakhic stipulations), it is highly possible that further remains existed in the layers beneath. The authors of the report admitted that the total number of buried individuals could be up to a thousand corpses but gave no rationale as to why. It is also not clear whether separate bones found in the upper soil layers were included in totals given. Since there are no drawings or photos of the bones or any skeletal inventories, it is difficult to reconstruct accurate topographies of human remains within the grave, making it particularly difficult to estimate how many individuals these belong to.

The authors of the report were correct to point out that the presence of female and child remains in the burials undoubtedly signifies that this was a burial of civilians.<sup>152</sup> However, the information about sex and age stated in the report can be considered relatively superficial because the report does not mention the presence of anthropologists during the excavation and the remains could not be analysed fully since they were only partially uncovered.

Finally, the archaeologists at Busk indicated which pits contained people that were executed directly at the cemetery and which pits were for victims killed in other sites but who had been brought there for burial. The researchers made their conclusions on the position of the remains, for example:

- the chaotic filling of the burials,
- the different poses of the deceased,
- the number (or complete absence) of bullet casings.

According to the report, pits 3,4, 7, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, partially 16 and 17 contained remains of victims that were shot at the cemetery (newly annotated as Fig. 2.3). Witnesses also report

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<sup>151</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006).

<sup>152</sup> Onyschuk Ya. (2006) p.17.

that the victims were placed at different sides of pits and shot<sup>153</sup>, which was partially validated by the significant density of corpses by the sides of some of these pits (3,10, 14, 17).

After conducting the archaeological fieldwork, the pits were backfilled with topsoil and concrete. This gives the site some protection from looting activities, but also makes any further archaeological investigation extremely difficult.<sup>154</sup>

As stated above, the Busk investigation is one of the best-known examples for the deployment of an archaeological approach at a Holocaust site in Ukraine. However, despite yielding many important results, the overall methodology that was selected lacked in key areas, setting an inappropriate precedent for other researchers to follow.

## **2.5. Reflection and Challenges in a Ukrainian Context**

Previous sections have indicated that the archaeological approach for Holocaust studies in Ukraine and worldwide has a multitude of forms and strategies. This section focuses on the analysis of main considerations and limits associated with use of forensic archaeological methods for Holocaust studies in Ukrainian context.

### **2.5.1. Perception of archaeology in Ukraine**

As it was defined in previous sections, forensic archaeology is not considered a separate discipline in modern-day Ukraine. In order to understand the current situation of archaeological studies, it is first necessary to explain how Ukrainians view archaeological work. That will later allow to infer what limits and considerations exist in modern-day Ukraine for potential advancement of forensic archaeological methods for Holocaust studies.

From the standpoint of the current Ukrainian academic community, archaeology is considered a science that studies the ancient past, i.e., the archaeology of antiquity. The term "ancient" is

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<sup>153</sup> YIUA, 301 U; YIUA, 302 U; YIUA, 33 U.

<sup>154</sup> Desbois, P. (2011), p. 254.

somewhat arbitrary. Current scholars define boundaries as follows: **ancient** - over 500 years ago (in the context of history of Ukraine approximately up to the Cossacks era (15<sup>th</sup> century)), **historic** – 100 – 500 years ago, and **modern** – from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>155</sup> The structure of the country's central archaeological institution – the Institute of Archaeology, National Academy of Science of Ukraine validates this position.<sup>156</sup> It is indirectly inferred from the legislation:

"An object of archaeological heritage is defined as a location, a building, a complex, their parts, their associated territories or bodies of water, human-made, regardless of condition or state of preservation, that has an absolute present value from the archaeological, anthropological or ethnographic standpoint and is considered either fully or partially authentic".<sup>157</sup>

Archaeological objects of cultural heritage are defined as:

"The residue of human activity (unmovable objects of cultural heritage such as hill forts, mounds, remains of ancient settlements, camps, fortifications, war camps, manufacturing sites, irrigation constructions, roads, funeral sites, places and objects of worship, their remains and ruins, megaliths, caves, rock art, sections of cultural layer, places of ancient fights, and all movable objects associated with them), that are located under the ground surface and underwater, and they are irreproducible sources of information about the inception and development of civilisations".<sup>158</sup>

This interpretation of archaeology in Ukrainian society has resulted in the focus on ancient history and in marginalisation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sites.

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<sup>155</sup> Nafté, M. (2000) *Flesh and bone: an introduction to forensic anthropology*. Durham, N.C., Carolina Academic Press, p. 30.

<sup>156</sup> *Institute of Archaeology National Academy of Science of Ukraine* (2018). Available at: <https://iananu.org.ua/struktura> (Accessed: 15 December 2022).

<sup>157</sup> *Zakon Ukrainy pro ohoronu arheologichnoi spadschiny* (2004) Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1626—15#Text>. (Accessed on: 11 November 2021, art. 1.

<sup>158</sup> *Zakon Ukrainy pro Kul'turnu spadschinu* (2000) Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1805—14>. (Accessed on: 11 November 2021), Art. 2.2.

### 2.5.2. Perception of Holocaust sites and mass graves in Ukraine

Based on above, it is obvious that current Ukrainian law code within archaeological space is primarily focused on objects of antiquity. There are only a few legal and regulatory instruments that could be applied for archaeological studies of objects related to the Holocaust. The aim of this section is to analyse how these studies are regulated and what gaps exist in the current law code.

The *Temporary order regulating archaeological searches, exhumations and reburials of those who died during wars, deportations and political repressions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and keeping those sites in order* (further: *the Temporary Order*) ratified in 2006, regulating all fieldwork at mass graves, especially those dated from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These are considered "field search works", which are defined as a complex of underground (or underwater) investigations aimed to establish an approximate figure of the remains at a particular site.<sup>159</sup> Additionally, *the Temporary Order* prescribes obtaining a permit to conduct such works following current legislation.<sup>160</sup> Despite existing legal ambiguity, there is no specific standard template form for receiving such a permit. Ukrainian legislation provides two types of permits that could govern such works:

- A permit to conduct archaeological work.<sup>161</sup> It is essential to understand that "search work" and "archaeological works" are recognised as two separate categories.<sup>162</sup>
- A permit to conduct ground and construction work.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> *Tymchasovyi poriadok zdiysnennia na terytorii Ukrainy poshuku, ekskumatsii ta perezpohovannia ostankiv osib, yaki zagynuly v naslidok voyen, deportatsii ta politychnykh represii i vporiadkuvannia mist' ikhniogo pohovannia (2006)* Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0969-06#Text> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021), Art. 1.4.

<sup>160</sup> *Tymchasovyi poriadok (2006)* Art. 2.1.

<sup>161</sup> *Zakon Ukrainy pro ohoronu arheologichnoi spadschiny (2004)* art. 10.

<sup>162</sup> *Zakon Ukrainy pro ohoronu arheologichnoi spadschiny (2004)* art. 1.

<sup>163</sup> *Poriadok vydachi dozvoliv na provedennia arheologichnykh rozvidok, rozkopok, inshykh zemlianykh robit na terytorii pam'yatky, okhroniuvanii arheologichnii terytorii, v zonakh okhorony, v istorychnykh arealakh naselenykh mist's, a takozh doslidzhen' reshtok zhytiediyal'nosti liudyny, scho mistiat'sia pid zemnoyu poverkhneyu, pid vodoyu na terytotii Ukrainy (2002)* Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/316-2002-%D0%BF#Text> (Accessed: 15 December 2022), art. 6.

The factors which limit the application of forensic archaeology in Ukraine are a result from the following legal issues: (1) the procedure for obtaining such permits necessitates archaeological fieldwork which should be done before any other as a part of construction work (rescue archaeology) rather than research; (2) the qualification requirements are not as strict as those for archaeological fieldwork and these lack professional credibility; (3) there are no specific directives on processing artefacts that are found during such research. While there is a process for the reburial of unearthened human remains, the artefacts are the responsibility of the exploration organiser. Meanwhile, a permit for archaeological fieldwork specifically stipulates the place for storing artefacts found during excavations.

The searching of mass graves in Ukraine is also subject to the process described in the Ukrainian Burials Law. Article 24 refers to the unknown burial sites, which are frequently associated with Holocaust victims. According to this article, upon discovering an unknown burial site, one must contact the law enforcement agencies to confirm that the site is not a crime scene. Afterwards, the burial site must be reported to local administrative authorities for investigation and registration of the site.

As per Article 30 of the same Law, mass graves (maintenance and protection) are the responsibility of local authorities, as well as cultural heritage protection agencies. Therefore, in case of discovery of any traces of illegal activity at a burial site, local police authorities and administrative officials must be notified. Local authorities also assign resources to protect all burial sites as per, Article 31. This article also states that financial responsibility for the restoration of a desecrated burial site lies with local administration. The reason for detailed analysis of Ukrainian legislation is the common practice to ignore looting at the Holocaust sites. However, the criminal proceeding should be initiated immediately after any signs of looting have been discovered. This is the most efficient method to solve these crimes as well as to prevent them from going forward. It is also the foundation for the restoration of the monuments by getting financing from the local budget. The burial site protection is also treated by Article 3 of *the Order of Maintenance for Cemeteries and Similar Burial Sites*.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> *Poriadok utrymannia kladovysch ta inshykh mists' pohovannia* (2003) Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1113-04#Text> (Accessed: 15 December 2022).

## 2.6. Factors affecting searches for Holocaust victims

Searches related to Holocaust and genocide studies can be traumatic and sensitive anywhere, not just in Ukraine. One of the key challenges for modern scholars is to find a balance between compliance with the academical principles and in a way that does not upset or offend others. Such approaches are covered in more detail by Polak<sup>165</sup> and Sturdy Colls.<sup>166</sup>

While working with Holocaust victims' burials, it is crucial to remember that their murderers were trying hard to dehumanise them, to destroy them both physically and spiritually. Sturdy Colls mentioned that the legal system in many countries requires crime scene investigation regardless of the religious denomination of the victim.<sup>167</sup> In some cases, this requirement provokes an ethical conflict (for example, when attempting to exhume individuals who are Roma<sup>168</sup>, Jews, or Australian aboriginals<sup>169</sup>).

### 2.6.1. Hierarchy of victims

Based on the wider definition of the Holocaust (see Introduction) the victims of this genocide belonged to multiple ethnic, social, and political groups.<sup>170</sup> The consequence of that is that the memorial sites frequently become places of commercial competition, as well as create ethical

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<sup>165</sup> Polak, J. (2001) 'Exhuming Their Neighbors: A Halakhic Inquiry'. *A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 23–43.

<sup>166</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) pp. 64-77; Sturdy Colls, C. (2016) pp. 163–196.

<sup>167</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2018) 'Holocaust Victims, Jewish Law and the Ethics of Archaeological Investigations', *Accessing Campscapes: Inclusive Strategies for Using European Conflicted Heritage*, 3, pp. 22-41.

<sup>168</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) pp.72-74; Hewitt, C (2017) *Fearing the Return of the Dead in Gypsy Burial Traditions*, (Blog). Available at: <http://blog.sevenponds.com/cultural—perspectives/> (Accessed: 11 November 2021).

<sup>169</sup> *Fact sheet: Aboriginal burials* (2019) Available at: <https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/fact—sheet—aboriginal—burials>. (Accessed: 15 December 2022); Ball, D. and Kelly, Z. "Genesis" *Legislative proposal of Recognition of burial customs of Aboriginal people of New South Wales. Connection of land in the past and present times concerning Multiple burials.* Available at: <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:YF01D6S3KQMJ:https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx%3Fid%3D5868f5e7—8b88—4da6—bb5e—bf6cff772c55%26subId%3D659003+&cd=1&hl=uk&ct=clnk&gl=uk>. (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

<sup>170</sup> NB: As outlined in Introduction, some scholars refer mostly to the execution of Jews when using the term, *the Holocaust*. For this reason, more inclusive terms are proposed, i.e., *Nazi Genocidal Project*: Beorn, W.(2018) *The Holocaust in Eastern Europe At the Epicentre of the Final Solution*. London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, p. 4.

dilemmas on whether some categories of victims deserve to be commemorated and whether they should be considered victims at all.

The Nazis and their allies declared the following categories to be enemies of the Third Reich on the territory of modern Ukraine: Jews, Roma, Prisoners of War, and mentally disabled. There also many others outside these categories. People of Slavic ethnicity (such as Ukrainians and Russians) were also frequently killed as hostages (for example, as a warning to partisans) or as a method of punishment (in contrast to Western Europe, where any help to Jews or other "Reich enemies" was still punishable by being sent to a concentration camp (or labour camp) for possible death.<sup>171</sup> Local Ukrainian individuals and groups were executed for hiding or assisting Jews in any way.<sup>172</sup>

In contrast, it is impossible to ignore the controversial topic of collaborations with the Nazis. Bartov argued thirteen years ago that glorification of perpetrators (Ukrainian nationalists) erased traces of victims (Jews) in Western Ukraine.<sup>173</sup> His research opened a significant discussion for Ukrainian society about the commemoration of Ukrainian resistant's fighters (Members of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Resistance Army (UPA)) and their role in the Holocaust. It should be mentioned that this topic had a strong reception in Soviet/Russian and Ukrainian historiography where the opposite points of view were, and still are, taking Ukrainian resistant movement members as either criminals or heroes.<sup>174</sup> Recent research has shown that this controversial question is impossible to present

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<sup>171</sup>For example: profiles of Anne Frank "helpers": The Righteous Among the Nations Database (Yad Vashem). Available at: <https://righteous.yadvashem.org/> (Accessed: 15 December 2022); Kugler Victor and Kleiman Johannes.

<sup>172</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011) p. 93; Sukovata, V. (2013) 'Teaching Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Modern Ukraine: Problems' in *The Holocaust in Ukraine : new sources and perspectives, conference presentations*. Washington: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, USHMM, p. 206; Pohl, D. (2014) 'The Holocaust in Ukraine: History—Historiography—Memory', in: *Stalin and Europe: imitation and domination, 1928—1953*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 41-112.

<sup>173</sup> Bartov, O. (2007) *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

<sup>174</sup> For more information: Hrynevych, V. (2007) 'Suspil'no-politychni nastroi naselennia Ukrainy v roky Drugoi svitovoi viiny: istoriografichni notatky', *Problemy istorii Ukrainy: facty, sudzhennia, poshuky*, 16(1), pp. 405-434; Prymachenko, Ya. (2013) 'Viina pam'ati: istoriya OUN i UPA v suchasnomu sociokul'turnomu konteksti ukrains'kogo istoriopysannia', *Promlemy istorii Ukrainy: facty, sudzhennia, poshuky*, Volume 21, pp. 18-30.



only in terms of black and white.<sup>175</sup> There still exists a strong stereotype about the Ukrainian perpetrators being harsher than the Germans. It was truthful in some cases such as, those pertaining to the Trawniki guards or the Jewish pogrom (massacre) in Lviv.<sup>176</sup> However, there exists another important aspect: Ukrainians as Righteous (helpers and saviours).<sup>177</sup> Indeed, it is much easier to talk about rescue than about guilt. Nevertheless, the crucial principle for all studies is to discover the truth and to reconstruct the complete story.

Ukraine is not alone in having this complicated legacy. Resonance research was published in Poland and Lithuania about local people who were Jewish perpetrators during the Holocaust.<sup>178</sup> In contrast to Poland and Lithuania - which were unified states before the Nazi and Soviet occupation - the territory of Ukraine was divided between different countries during the entire Interwar period. That is why, to draw a complete picture of local collaborations, the historical background and local specifics for all parts of what is now Ukraine should be analysed. A good example is presented in the Dumitru book,<sup>179</sup> where the contrast between the two parts of present-day Moldova (Romanian and Soviet) is considered. Her discoveries explained some unanswered questions in the history of the region, such as dissimilar levels of antisemitism, reasons for locals taking part in killing, and individual strategies for surviving.

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<sup>175</sup> Dean, M. (2000) *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44*. New York: St. Martin's, in association with USHMM; Podolsky, A. (2010) 'Collaboration in Ukraine during the Holocaust: Aspects of historiography and research', in R. Stauber (Ed.) *Collaboration with the Nazis: Public Discourse after the Holocaust*. Routledge; Lower, W. (2012) 'Axis Collaboration, Operation Barbarossa and the Holocaust in Ukraine', in A. Kay, J. Rutherford, and D. Stahel *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*, Rochester University Press, pp.186-220; Golczewski, F. (2008) 'Shades of Grey: Reflections on Jewish—Ukrainian and German—Ukrainian Relations in Galicia', in R. Brandon and W. Lower *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*. Bloomington, pp. 114—155.

<sup>176</sup> Black, P. (2011) 'Foot Soldiers of the Final Solution: The Trawniki Training Camp and Operation Reinhard', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 25, Issue 1. pp. 1–99; Himka, J.-P. (2011) 'The Lviv Pogrom of 1941: The Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd', *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes*, 53(2/4), pp. 209-243; Struve, K. (2017) 'OUN (b), nimtsi ta antyevreis'ke nasył'stvo v Galychini vlitku 1941'. *Ukraina Moderna*, 24, pp. 234-255.

<sup>177</sup> For example: Kovba, Zh. (2009) *Ludianist' u bezodni pekla. Povedinka mistsevogo naselenia Galychyny v roky „ostatochnogo rozviazanniaevreis'kogo pytanja”*, Kyiv: Dukh i Litera; Levitas, I. (2016) *Pravednyky Babynogo Yaru*. Kharkiv: Folio.; Skira, Yu. (2019) *Poklykani: monakhy Studiis'kogo Ustavu ta Holokost*, Kyiv: Dukh I Litera.

<sup>178</sup> Gross, J. T. (2001), Vanagaite, R., Zuroff, E. (2020) *Our people*. Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>179</sup>Dumitru, D. (2016) *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### 2.6.2. Perception of human remains examination in modern science.

It should be noted that the basic principles for all investigations should implement general human rights such as, “all humans are equal before law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law”, “everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to the law” and everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without any discrimination based on race, nationality or religion.<sup>180</sup> The author of this research did not set an aim to charge perpetrators or create a hierarchy of victims. Particularly with regard to the Ukrainian context, it is impossible in most cases for different victim groups from the same burial place to be separated. Additionally, different ethnical and religious identities of victims in the same mass grave became a reason for selection of the most appropriate methods for conducting research.

Scientific research dealing with human remains has to follow ethical and religious norms appropriate to the deceased and to the local community. The brief overview of theoretical principles is provided below, but the majority are still ignored in practice. The requirement for Human remains treatment is captured in sections 2.5; 3.7; 4.3 *Human Remains and Materials ICOM Code Ethics for Museum*, which is ratified by Ukraine.<sup>181</sup> The problem of studying human remains is also described in *The Vermillion Accord on Human Remains*, adopted in 1989 at the World Archaeological Inter-Congress. Sections 2 and 3 specifically state that the study process has to account for wishes of the deceased regarding the future of their remains (which should be interpreted as compliance with religious laws of the dead's faith), as well as those of their relatives and local community.<sup>182</sup> This document, even though not officially adopted in Ukraine, is considered to be a guideline for all archaeologists. Unfortunately, the question regarding the study of human remains was not addressed by *the Ukrainian Code of Ethics for professional archaeologists*.<sup>183</sup> Potekhina, Head of Department of Bioarchaeology at the

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<sup>180</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948). Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021) Art. 2,7,11.

<sup>181</sup> *The ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* (2017) Available at: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/ethics/code-of-ethics/> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

<sup>182</sup> *The Vermillion Accord on Human Remains* (1989) <https://worldarch.org/code-of-ethics/> Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

<sup>183</sup> *Code of ethics for professional archaeologists* (in Ukrainian) (2006). Available at: <http://vgosau.kiev.ua/pro-nas/normatyvno-pravova-baza/155-kodeks-etyky> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

Institute of Archaeology of National Academy of Science of Ukraine, explains in detail the gaps in the current Ukrainian legislation concerning the study of human remains.<sup>184</sup> She also refers to the Regulation on the methodology of archaeological research and the reporting procedure adopted in 2008.<sup>185</sup>

### 2.6.3. Religious consideration

Modern research standards require practitioners to uphold a high ethical bar, particularly when it comes to such complex and sensitive topics as genocides. There are many places in Ukraine where archaeological studies would be necessary, but this thesis focuses on Jewish mass graves and killing sites, because Jewish Holocaust burial sites make up most of the burials of that period. Therefore, respecting Jewish religious laws becomes an essential aspect of giving respect to the deceased. An essential consideration to researchers comes from Halakha<sup>186</sup> (Jewish law), which states it is prohibited to disturb the resting places of Jews in any form.<sup>187</sup> Within this constraint, the use of non-invasive technologies, such as those used by forensic archaeologists, becomes indispensable.

According to Halakha, an act of desecration of a dead body or burial place is treated as an equivalent to murder. The roots of this belief are tied to the idea of eventual resurrection, and disruption to posthumous peace makes death irreversible.<sup>188</sup> In particular, the following actions are prohibited at a Jewish cemetery: consumption of food and drinks, "light-hearted" conversations, walking through a cemetery as a shortcut, and using it as pastureland. Any type

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<sup>184</sup> Potekhina, I. (2011) 'Ukraine', in N. Márquez—Grant, L. Fibiger, (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeological Human Remains and Legislation: an international guide to laws and practice in the excavation, study and treatment of archaeological human remains*. London: Routledge, pp. 473-475.

<sup>185</sup>NB: This document should be available at the official web page of The Institute of Archaeology National Academy of Science of Ukraine, but it is not. Some basic research for anthropology studies in Ukraine available: Kozak, O., et. al. (2019) *Metodychni rekomendatsii z poliovoi antropologii. ArkhMET. Volume 1*, Lviv: NDTs „Riativna arkheologichna sluzhba” IA NAN Ukrainy, „Prostir-M”.

. These methodological guides were created for antiquities study not for the investigation of modern conflicts or genocides.

<sup>186</sup> NB: There are existing different ways for transliteration 'Halakha'/ הלְכָה into English: Halakha or Halacha, but both of them are relevant.

<sup>187</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) pp.66-69; Deutsch, D. (2016) 'Exhumations in post—war rabbinical responsas', in E. Anstett and J.-M. Dreyfus (eds) *Human remains in society*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 90-112.

<sup>188</sup> *Yevreiskie kladbisha*. (web page). Available at: <https://toldot.ru/evrejskieKladbisha.htm> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

of invasive activity, either for reburial or research, must be approved and accompanied by rabbinical guidance. Respect for the dead and their burials are a critical aspect of any studying activity of a burial site. Some of the specific reasons why Jewish burial sites cannot be disturbed are:

- In Judaism any disturbance at the grave is akin to stealing from the deceased since the burial site is considered their home after death.
- The remains could theoretically be split and buried into different graves, which disrupts the wholeness of the body.

Holocaust victims are considered Tzadik / Tzaddiq (Hebrew: צַדִּיק "righteous man").<sup>189</sup> Therefore their places of final rest may not be disturbed.<sup>190</sup>

Presently, the Rabbinical support for keeping religious requirement during archaeological fieldwork in Ukraine is carried out mostly by Jewish organisations based abroad. For instance, the group of Rabbis from The London-based Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe were involved in archaeological fieldwork during the Protecting Memory Project.<sup>191</sup> The Israel-based voluntary community emergency response team ZAKA were involved in religious supervision during an archaeological excavation in Busk (Lviv region).<sup>192</sup> It means that organisations who manage current situation in Ukraine relating to the treatment of Jewish remains during any works at Holocaust sites (such as research, construction or memorialisation) rarely specialise on Ukrainian context and are commonly based abroad. This creates a lack of interaction with the local community and reduces efficiency.

A success story of a non-profit organisation focused on Holocaust sites identification, research and commemoration while maintaining religious rules is the Polish foundation *Zapomniane*.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup>NB: Concept tzaddiks could be compared with Christian saints, but it is not identical. Tzadiks are partially responsible for the sins of their generation: in *Tzaddiq* at *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>190</sup> Desbois, P. (2011) p. 181.

<sup>191</sup> Protecting memory (2019)

<sup>192</sup> Desbois, P. (2011) p. 251.

<sup>193</sup> *Zapomniane foundation* (web page) Available at: <https://zapomniane.org/en/about/> (Accessed: 15 December 2022).

This organisation's mission focuses on a comprehensive approach which includes archaeological fieldworks, commemoration studies, historical studies searching for forgotten Holocaust victim mass graves in Poland. Their investigations are based on Jewish Religious Law and are supervised by Jewish Rabbinical Authorities. The purpose of their activity is not only scholarly interest but involvement of the local community and investigation of Jewish-Polish coexistence over the course of centuries. Their methodological approach has been strongly influenced by the Centre of Archaeology methodology on previous projects. The *Zapomniane* foundation is working in collaboration with the Centre of Archaeology (led by prof. Sturdy Colls) on a number of cases now.

The modern Ukrainian legal system does not stipulate this provision, but since Holocaust studies are not considered a legal proceeding, scientists must observe religious norms of Judaism. The protection of these burials become a key one. This means that without conducting specific studies that can provide information on the exact location: the size of the burial and an approximate number of victims, these burials cannot receive official protected status from local government and thus become open to threats including agriculture and looting.<sup>194</sup>

## 2.7. Conclusion

Chapter 2 presented an overview of implementation of archaeological approach for Holocaust studies in Europe and in Ukraine. This chapter identifies main scenarios of application in archaeological and forensic archaeological methods for genocide investigations.

The key issue to be derived from the above discussion is that Holocaust sites in Ukraine have a significant perspective in terms of its potential to be investigated archaeologically, and there are various issues surrounding this. In particular, that the Holocaust is still a recent event and many people who survived during this dramatical event, or their relatives are still alive. The specific mechanics of killing and the nature of Holocaust in Ukraine, these tragedies almost

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<sup>194</sup> *Poriadok obliku obyektiv kul'turnoi spadschiny* (2013) Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0528-13#Text> (Accessed: 15 December 2022) part II art 3, part IV art. 12, part V art 1.

oblivion during most of Soviet era, and the detailed understanding of archaeological discipline in Ukraine led to a large variety of examples of practical implementation of archaeological approach. Despite several projects that follow strict forensic standards, the majority still remains in amateur category and brings more harm than benefits.

The evaluation of previous investigations and studies highlighted that; many ethical complexities are apparent within an archaeological investigation of Holocaust sites that are common for such studies in all of Europe (for instance, strict adherence to scientific standards while respecting religious norms) and those specific for Ukraine (e.g., burial of different groups of victims in the same grave).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Introduction

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, there is a notable gap in knowledge about Holocaust landscapes in Ukraine at micro-history level. The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the methodological approaches that were chosen to fill this gap and to achieve the aims and objectives of this study (see Chapter 1). The exclusions and limitations encountered by the author during research will also be explained.

The approach that became the foundation of this study has an interdisciplinary character and is based on a combination of historical, archaeological, forensic and geographical methods.<sup>195</sup> This was necessary because the aims of this study focus on new investigations of Holocaust sites in Ukraine and the documentation and reinterpretation of previous projects within the Ukrainian context and with knowledge of new methods. In order to survey the entire landscape, the following sources are used as primary data (first-hand sources): oral witness testimonies, historical documents, maps, forensic reports (e.g., the *acts*<sup>196</sup> of the Extraordinary Commissions), and archaeological data and geographical data collected during fieldwork. Secondary data (materials containing an interpretation of facts) were also used e.g., summary reports of the previous investigations and published literature.

##### 3.1.1. Mass grave and killing sites: terms and types

As this study focuses on mass grave investigation, this chapter first requires a definition of a mass grave. Commonly, the concept of *mass grave* is more of an archaeological term than a legal one.<sup>197</sup> According to Skinner, a mass grave should contain the remains of at least six

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<sup>195</sup> Due to the interdisciplinary character of this research, it is impossible to describe separately the historical, geographical, forensic and archaeological methods employed for this project. For example, analysing oral history sources could be considered a historical method. However, it was employed for desk-based assessment and interpretation of archaeologically-derived data. For this reason, the description of the applied methodology was given based on phases of research when specific methods had been used.

<sup>196</sup> NB: specific type of document, usually described research of a small object or part of the site instead of the investigation the whole location.

<sup>197</sup> Jessee, E and Skinner, M. (2005) 'A typology of mass grave and mass grave-related sites', *Forensic science international*, 152(1), p. 55.

individuals.<sup>198</sup> Other views are also existing.<sup>199</sup> With that, the definition of "mass" is a somewhat arbitrary one.<sup>200</sup> Current Ukrainian legislation does not have a clear description of a mass grave. In *the Ukrainian Burials Law*, the following concepts are defined:

"Grave – a place at a cemetery, crematorium, columbarium or some other building or structure dedicated for the process of the burial of the dead, where a casket with deceased's body or an urn with ashes is interred."<sup>201</sup>

And:

Place of interment – a cemetery, crematorium, columbarium or some other building or structure dedicated to the internment of deceased".<sup>202</sup>

These definitions are insufficient, so this study will leverage international practice (see the typology of a mass grave in Table 3.1.).

Aspects of typology	Types
Legal aspects of a mass grave	Sites containing remains of lawfully executed civilians or military personnel buried in an appropriate manner. Sites containing remains of lawfully executed civilians or military personnel but buried in an improper way
Legal aspects of a manner of death	Sites containing remains of mass killing civilians or military personnel victims buried appropriately / correctly. Sites containing remains of mass killing civilians or military personnel victims, buried improperly;
Method of killing	Accidental. Intentional.
Mass grave-related sites	Killing sites,

<sup>198</sup> Skinner, M. (1987) 'Planning the archaeological recovery of evidence from recent mass graves', *Forensic science international*, 34(4), p. 268.

<sup>199</sup> Hunter, J. Simpson, B. and Sturdy Colls, C. (2013). *Forensic Approaches to Buried Remains*. London: Wiley, Ch. 8

<sup>200</sup> Juhl, K. (2005) *The Contribution by (Forensic) Archaeologists to Human Rights Investigations of Mass Graves*. Stavanger: AmS—nett 5, Arkeologisk museum 17, p. 15. Hunter, J, Simpson, B. and Sturdy Colls C. (2013) (chapter 8).

<sup>201</sup> *Zakon Ukrainy pro pohovannq ta pohoval'nu spravu* (2004) Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1102-15#Text> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021) art.2.

<sup>202</sup> *Zakon Ukrainy pro pohovannq ta pohoval'nu spravu* (2004) art.2.



	Temporary (surface) deposition sites, Permanent inhumation sites, Cenotaph or symbolic burial sites.
According to the way of burial	Inhumation, Cremation, Burial of body parts.
Inhumation sites	Primary inhumation site, Secondary inhumation site, Multiple inhumation site, Looted inhumation site.
Disposing	Burial, Quasi-burial, Non-burial methods.

*Table. 3.1. Typology of the mass grave<sup>203</sup>*

### **3.2. Research procedure**

This research employs case study approaches underpinned by qualitative and quantitative methods.<sup>204</sup> The methodology can be broadly divided into two parts: 1. the desk-based investigation phase – which includes a previous investigation review/literature review, archival searches and the interpretation of documents, oral histories, aerial imagery and other sources and 2. fieldwork data collection and analysis - which includes walkover survey of the sites (reconnaissance data collection), forensic archaeological fieldwork, and data analysis. This chapter mirrors this approach by first explaining the rationale and details of source selection and the evaluation of information collected from them. The second part provides specific information on different forensic archaeological methods employed during the fieldwork stage.

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<sup>203</sup>NB: This table does not include traditional types of graves such as tombs, vaults, crypts, flat graves. Characteristics comprised in the table identify features important for further forensic analyses and crime scene reconstruction. The table was created based on Jessee, E. and Skinner, M. (2005); Juhl, K. (2005), pp. 16-17.

<sup>204</sup> The theoretical base of the research procedure and main principles were described in Chapter 2.

### 3.2.1. Desk-based investigation

Documentary evidence pertaining to Holocaust studies is represented in multiple formats: official documents, including reports and correspondence, witness accounts, various types of images (photos, drawings), and various cartographical objects (maps, plans). This research used both original documents (primary sources) and previously published ones in other research (secondary sources). Access to a large portion of documents was gained by working with archival collections, as described below, in addition to working with online archives and databases.<sup>205</sup> Even though different types of sources are frequently held in one collection, each category has special methods for investigation. This project describes several main categories: documentary, cartography and oral history sources. Although these are the main categories of sources used for this research, additional ones were used as well, such as photographs and statistical data.

Working with archival collections was one of the main stages of this project. In the first instance, the research was based on working with primary sources, mainly Soviet and Ukrainian ones. This decision was made due to the fact that for many decades documents stored at institutions of the former USSR were primarily out of reach for researchers. Consequently, most of the research in the field of Holocaust studies in Ukraine done in previous years, was based on documents found in Western European institutions.<sup>206</sup> Many German documents were introduced to the academic community as part of published documents or their excerpts and secondary sources. There are also excerpts of German documents available in other archival collections.<sup>207</sup> Therefore, tragic events of the wartime era were frequently shown from the viewpoint of perpetrators rather than victims.<sup>208</sup>

The methodological justifications of this approach were that Ukraine seems to follow a clear and consistent long-term policy of opening access to the Soviet archival collections. For instance, in 2014 researchers gained open the widely available access to the Archives

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<sup>205</sup> NB: The translation of archival documents from Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish was made by the author.

<sup>206</sup> Kruglov A., Umansky A. and Shchupak I.(2016).

<sup>207</sup> For example, TsDAVO F. 3206 [Reichkantseliariya Ukrainiy](#).

<sup>208</sup> Snyder, T. (2010).

Department of the Security Service of Ukraine (GDA SBU) (former KGB (Security service in the former Soviet Union) archive), which has been recognised as the most transparent archive amongst secret service archives worldwide.<sup>209</sup> At the same time, other Ukrainian archives became more accessible to researchers. This provides access to a significant corpus of documents that have not previously been introduced to the academic community. The key sources from different collections are presented in Table 3.2.

As stated in the Introduction chapter, this study aims to establish the most probable location of burials to conduct fieldwork in that area and then interpret the results in the most accurate manner. This requires collecting the most amount of data possible in order to reconstruct events that took place over 70 years ago.

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<sup>209</sup> *Ukraina ocholyła reityng vidkrytosti arhiviv KDB* (2018) Available at: <https://www.umoloda.kiev.ua/number/0/196/127533/> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021)

Archival or web resource	Number of folders analysed for this project (if relevant)	Collection description	An essential document for this research
<b>The State Archives Department of the Security Service of Ukraine</b>	77 folders	The collection mainly contains various Security Services reports, including those done in preparation for the Nuremberg and other Nazi criminal trials and Holocaust-related criminal proceedings. These documents can serve as the first examples of attempts to identify Holocaust traces. Also, criminal proceedings were collected from regional branches of archives which provided previously unknown information about the Holocaust in different parts of Ukraine.	The brief reports of Nazi atrocities and criminal proceedings against local perpetrators – these sources provided unique information about extermination locations. They led to identifying killing sites and mass graves even though such sites were unknown in other sources.
<b>The Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine</b>	107 folders	The collection of the Commission on History of the Great Patriotic War of Academy of Sciences of Ukrainian SSR and the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission materials. Mostly presented as copies or drafts, these documents provide the first evidence of crimes and descriptions of locations of burial sites. It needs to be pointed out that these notes were taken in a hurry and by non-professionals. They are however still important, as explained above. This archive also contains a Nazi document collection about "Reichscommissariat Ukraine". These documents depict the administrative system of occupied territory. The collection of Ministries of Health and Justice gave valuable information about forensic processes in the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II. In addition, there was data collected from different forensic services in Ukraine. These materials helped in the analysis of reports of the Extraordinary Commission (see Chapter 4).	Collections from different Ministries and institutions of the Ukrainian SSR help understand the aims and procedures of the Extraordinary Commissions. Drafts and copies of Extraordinary Commission reports often provide detailed information about the Holocaust in specific locations. Also, these documents illustrate that complete information was not included in the final version of the Commission's report and so key facts were missed or not transmitted into the public domain. For example, Opys 2, Collection (Fond) 3538 keeps correspondence between the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission and the General Extraordinary Commission in Moscow. This collection included important information about the first steps of Extraordinary Commissions' activity in Ukraine and

			criticism of it. It helps trace changes in procedures for different periods and locations.
<b>The Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine</b>	105 folders	The collection of The Commission on History of the Great Patriotic War of Academy of Sciences of Ukrainian SSR and the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission materials. Collections of different departments of the Central Committee of Communist Party provide a lot of information about Extraordinary Commission activity itself and some drafts of reports of this Commission.	The historical documents about the Holocaust and everyday life under the Nazi occupation for example: brief reports for local Communist Party branches provide information about destruction (mostly industrial objects) and atrocities. Many of these facts were not included in the Extraordinary Commission reports. Additionally, military maps, drawings and short information were included in reports for the Central Committee of Communist Party. There is beneficial information for reconstruction of wartime topography and finding of locations of Holocaust sites.
<b>The Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine</b>		The collection of Jewish heritage (manuscripts, pictures, etc.), pre-war ethnographical expedition reports, unpublished dissertations in the field of Holocaust studies.	
<b>The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum collection</b>	Four microfilm reels + 1 criminal proceeding	Copies of the Extraordinary Commission reports from different parts of Ukraine. This collection holds copies of final reports from the Russian State Archive. Access to this collection gives the possibility to analyse and compare from different places.	The most important finding for this research is the criminal proceeding of Shevket Shalovatov. He was claimed as a member of the local police under the Nazi occupation of Crimea; he also took part in the shooting of Jewish people. There forensic uncovering of the victim's remains was organised in late 1960. The reports of this expertise were attached to the criminal proceedings.
<b>Bundesarchive</b>	2 folders	A copy of the Extraordinary Commission report regarding Slavuta (2 reports). These cases provide significant information about mass graves in Slavuta (location, description, measurements) that were utilised to plan fieldwork and analyse data collected during archaeological fieldwork in May 2019.	The most important findings for this research were: the collection of the exhumation minutes from Slavuta, and two different plans of burial sites located in Slavuta.
<b>Yad Vashem Archive</b>	14 folders	This Archive has one of the most comprehensive collections of the Extraordinary Commission reports. Copies of the	

		Extraordinary Commission materials regarding the investigations in Slavuta in 1944. Copies of the Einsatzgruppen report regarding the mass murder of Jews in Slavuta.	
<b>OBD Memorial</b>		An online database created by The Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. This database kept information about the fate of Soviet militaries from different archives.	This database provides essential information about prisoners of Stalag in Slavuta. Indeed, using this database helped to identify some prisoners of Stalag in Slavuta. Furthermore, there are 3000 names of prisoners Stalag in Slavuta who were buried there.
<b>Yad Vashem Untold stories project</b>		A web resource that collects information about different killing sites, mainly in the territory of the former Soviet Union. Archival data from Yad Vashem was added for almost each location in this project.	
<b>Arolsen archives (International Center on Nazi Persecution)</b>		Online archive based on a collection of the International Tracing service. Attempts were made to trace the prisoners of the PoW camp in Slavuta (see Chapter 5). However, queries to this archive require at least prisoner names in order to trace their fate. In the case of Slavuta, the list of names of prisoners is yet to be discovered.	Unfortunately, the search tools provided by the archive do not have any other option of querying its database.

*Table 3.2. A shortlist of collections, including the most important documents for this research.*

A comprehensive approach to working with a significant amount of archival collections allowed the author to immerse more deeply into the general historical context and highlight non-standard ways of researching this topic. However, since the project has defined timelines, the author selected the most relevant archival collections that were critically important for the completion of this study.

It is crucial for this study to understand the history of the formation of a particular archival collection, and the structure of archival funds in Ukraine. This approach provides an opportunity to conduct the search for necessary information in the most efficient manner. For instance, the primary collection of originals of the Extraordinary Commission reports is stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (f. 7021) (not available to the author). Copies of some documents from this collection can be found in archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem. However, research on the operational process of the Commission revealed that local Commissions had to file their reports with the Central Commission in Moscow.<sup>210</sup> Frequently, copies of these reports were also sent to the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party and were stored in its archives, which, after the Independence of Ukraine, became the TsDAGO collection; copies of many documents (especially draft versions) remained in regional archives, as this is where they were stored by regional party branches. A large number of copies collected during the work of the Commission of the history of the Great Patriotic War, also ended up at the TsDAGO collection.<sup>211</sup> Particular attention should be paid towards the documents created during the work of the Ukrainian Republican Extraordinary Commission. At present, these documents are split between two archives: TsDAVO and TsDAGO, but initially, they were part of the same collection.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, in order to account for them correctly, the fact that this complex collection was held in two different sites had to be taken into consideration.

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<sup>210</sup> See: TsDAVO f. 4620/op. 1/ s. 1 [The Commission Orders](#). ; TsDAGO f. 1 /op.23/ s. 1062 [Correspondence Central Committee of Communist Party of Ukraine with regional branches of Communist Party of Ukraine: memos, pieces of information, acts of recording of atrocities committed by German-Fascist authorities during occupation of districts of Ukraine](#).

<sup>211</sup> TsDAGO f. 166 [Commission for Great Patriotic War History](#).

<sup>212</sup> TsDAVO f. 4620 [Collection of documents regarding Great Patriotic War History](#) and TsDAGO f. 166 [Commission for Great Patriotic War History](#).

It is also important to note that many documents are duplicated across several collections. Often, these documents are either identical or have minimal differences. However, sometimes a comparison of different copies of the same document can lead to unexpected results. For instance, this approach was employed by Berkhoff to analyse and compare known versions of testimonies of Babyn Yar survivor Dina Pronicheva.<sup>213</sup>

As stated earlier, this doctoral project had precise timelines, so the author had to limit the number of archival collections involved in the project. In future, there are plans to involve a significant number of collections of regional Ukrainian archives as well. The author used some documents from the State Archive of Khmelnytskyi region for Chapters 5 and 6. However, additional research would require more detailed work within these collections. In order to explain the decision to exclude regional archives from the scope of this research, some details need to be clarified regarding the process of creation of collections related to the Holocaust in Soviet archives. Frequently the basis of these collections was formed by documents collected by regional Extraordinary Commissions (for more details, see Chapter 4). Sometimes copies of such documents or summary reports of activity that related to surveys of sites of Nazi crimes, were sent to the General Extraordinary Commission or the Central Committee of The Communist Party of the Ukrainian SSR. Therefore, in most cases, these documents are represented in archival collections that were in scope. Another potentially important avenue of research is to investigate the collections of The Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance that should be gathering all documents related to repressions in Ukraine. The archive is still in the formation stage, so it is impossible to access their collections just yet.

The information available from these sources is essential for planning fieldwork (allowing a selection of the most perspective locations for further surveys) and assisting with correct interpretations of survey results. An important role for this doctoral research played records of previous investigations, which provided unique information inaccessible for collection by other methods (e.g. description of soft tissue wounds).

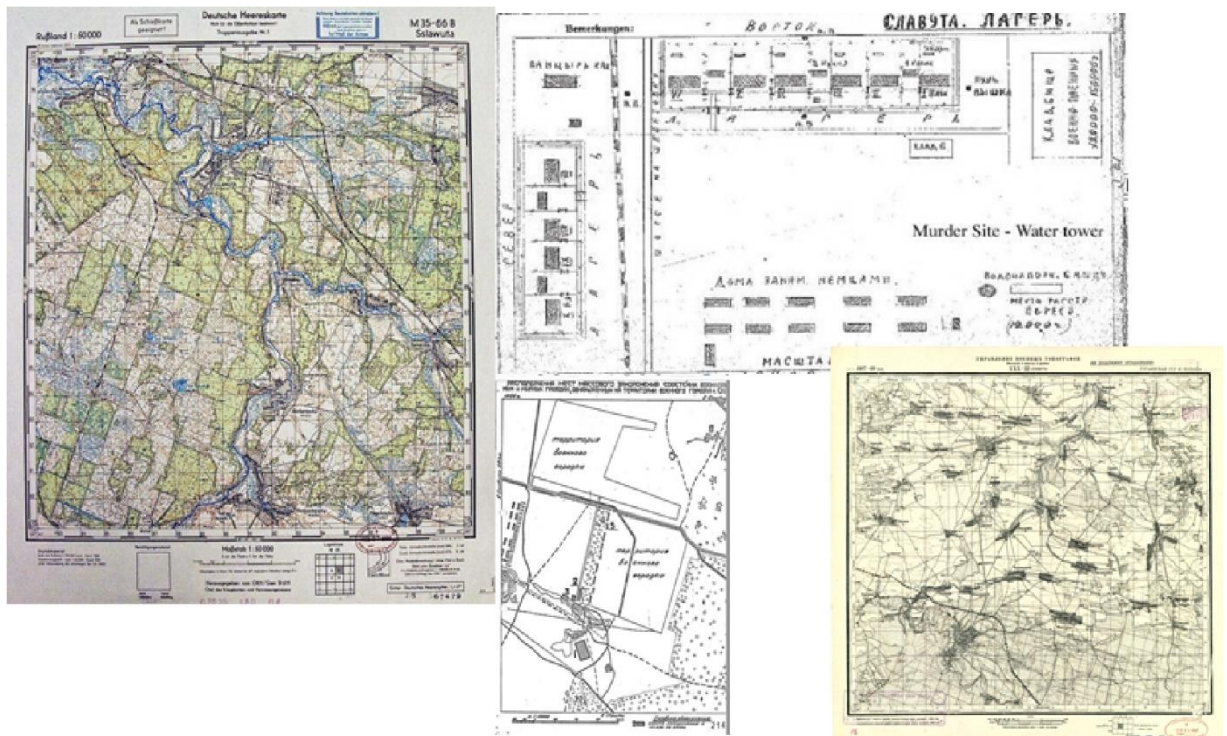
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<sup>213</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2015) 'Istoriya Diny Pronichevoi, yaka perezhyla Babyn Yar: nimets'ki, evreis'ki, radians'ki, rosiis'ki ta ukrains'ki dokumenty', in R. Brandon and W. Lower (Eds) *Shoa v Ukraini: istoriya, svidchennia, uvichnennia*. Kyiv: Dukh I Litera, pp. 397-432.



### 3.2.1.1. Cartographic data

A separate group of sources engaged for this research are various plans and maps. This type of evidence represents information about the landscape in a symbolical visual way. Different archival collections hold a varied range of multi-temporal maps. Furthermore, this type of document provides information on a different scale from micro-level to global and focuses on the presentation of selected characteristics such as military features, roads, geology, administrative and state boundaries. Many of these maps have been digitised and have open access (Fig.3.1.).<sup>214</sup>



*Fig. 3.1. Various maps and plans for Slavuta. This image illustrates the diversity in these types of sources. More detailed information on how Slavuta maps were used in this research will be provided in Chapters 5 and 6.*

<sup>214</sup> E.g. *Kolleksiya starinnykh kart. Ukraina (web site)* Available at <http://www.etomesto.ru/ukraine/> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022); A collection of German wartime maps at 3 km scale (web page) Available at: <http://freemap.com.ua/karty-ukrainy/nemeczkie-karty-vtoroj-mirovoj-voiny-3-x-kilometrovki> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

This type of document provides essential information on the landscape and topography of sites themselves but is not limited to this. Plans and maps of different times and scales give an understanding of changes in the environment caused by both the Holocaust and post-war landscape transformations. Understanding geology and landscape changes is a fundamental necessity when analysing archaeological data, especially when geophysical methods are to be applied.<sup>215</sup> In addition to, the examination of this type of data allows planned surveys to be prioritised accordingly.<sup>216</sup> The analysis of pre-war period maps provides unique information on wartime events such as: what a location was before, how the event changed the environment, what is a natural feature and what is artificial etc. The old maps and plans are also artefacts, because this type of data preserves unique information about the community's everyday life before destruction during WWII. For example, maps show the distribution of religion and communal buildings over a settlement and reveal the size and features of the different ethnic groups present. This aids understanding of relations between other ethnic communities in multi-cultural Ukrainian towns and villages.

The analysis of geological maps is an essential step for preparation before conducting a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey described in the next section.<sup>217</sup> The most crucial role in this matter belongs to the cadastral map of Ukraine available online. This is a comprehensive land recording that includes current information of a piece of land and its owner. Typically, the cadaster is helpful for understanding how land is being used.<sup>218</sup> This resource also identifies the landowner for the location so that permission and permits for fieldwork can be obtained.

### 3.2.1.2. *Oral history*

Oral history was used as one of the types of sources in this research. The testimonies of Holocaust survivors began to be collected shortly after WWII.<sup>219</sup> It was one of the tasks of the

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<sup>215</sup> Hunter, J., Roberts, Ch. And Martin, A. (1997) *Studies in Crime An Introduction to Forensic Archaeology*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 17.

<sup>216</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) p. 127.

<sup>217</sup> Hunter, J. R., Cox, M. (2005) p.34.

<sup>218</sup> Cadastr map of Ukraine (web page) *Available at* map.land.gov.ua (Accessed on: 11 November 2021)

<sup>219</sup> Brooks C. (2005) 'Visual History Archive Interviews on the Holocaust in Ukraine' in *The Holocaust in Ukraine: new sources and perspectives, conference presentations*. Washington: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, USHMM, p. 18.

Extraordinary Commission. They were also collected by members of the Jewish Antifascist Committee and became the basis of 'Chornaya kniga / Black book', edited by Erenburg and Grossman.<sup>220</sup> The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies later became pioneers in collecting video interviews of eyewitnesses. This collection resides at the Yale University Library and amounts to more than 4800 video testimonies.<sup>221</sup> Steven Spielberg's *The Survivors of the Shoah* Visual History Foundation (now the USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education) became one of the first to collect video interviews with Holocaust survivors:<sup>222</sup> Jews, Roma, former PoWs, in the territory of Ukraine in 1995-1999 after the USSR fell apart.<sup>223</sup> In recent years the amount of projects that collect interviews in the territory of Ukraine has grown quite rapidly. In this research, the author used oral witness testimonies collected by the Yahad-In Unum team (see Chapter 2).

During this research, the author participated in a fellowship program of Yahad-In Unum - *Holocaust Young Scholars Workshop* - and got access to their virtual archive of oral witness testimonies (24 video interviews about the Holocaust in Berdychiv, Busk, Slavuta, Shepetivka, Iziaslav, Pechera, Mikhalcha were acquired and analysed). Data collected from this archive was reviewed and compared with other sources (see Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6). Some data was also used to prepare for fieldwork and GPR data analysis in Slavuta.

In this research, the author used data gathered from witness interviews in conjunction with data collected from other sources, which provided an opportunity to double-check some facts and establish gaps and connection areas as part of the analysis (Chapter 5 and 6).

It is worth pointing out that working with these types of sources requires exceptional diligence and circumspection, considering the particulars of human memory of traumatic events. Kis points out the following aspects that have to be considered when using oral history for

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<sup>220</sup>Grossman, V. and Erenburg, I. (1980) *Chiornaya kniga*. Jerusalem: Tarbut.

<sup>221</sup> Shenkel, N. (2016) 'Through the Lens of the Shoah: The Holocaust as a Paradigm for Documenting Genocide Testimonies.' *History and Memory*, 28(1), pp. 146-147.

<sup>222</sup> USC Shoah Foundation (website) *The Institute for Visual History and Education*. Available at: <https://vha.usc.edu/home> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>223</sup> Brooks C. (2013) p. 18.

studying traumatic events related to Soviet history (including the Holocaust in the Ukrainian SSR)<sup>224</sup>:

- collective memory outranks personal memory because, for many years, the Soviet people were taught a single 'true' memory shared by everyone;
- a diminished value of personal experience;
- fear to discuss topics that were tabooed in Soviet times.

It is not just the particularities of oral history in the former USSR that require a particular approach. The memories of traumatic events could be painful, so interviewees frequently try to avoid these topics.<sup>225</sup> They are in control of what to mention and what to leave unsaid. Therefore, this factor always has to be considered by researchers. It means that it is possible that some, even important, details could be not mentioned or misinterpreted (deformed) by the interviewee. In this case, the cross-checking with other types of sources are required.

The interviewer's role can also be a topic of discussion as they are tasked with moderating the conversation. In some cases, the interviewer's influence can be overpowering and negatively impact the respondent. For example, if an interviewee cannot "open up" and give a personal recollection, they may be guided to agree with the opinions expressed by an interviewer.<sup>226</sup> This should be a crucial consideration when oral history is employed as a research tool, even if eyewitness testimonies match historical evidence, such as the Extraordinary Commissions reports or more recent trial records. As Father Desbois argues, such testimony on its own is insufficient to confirm the accuracy of an event in all detail.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Kis, O. (2006) 'Usna istoriya: stanovlennia, problematyka, metodologichni zasady', *Ukraina Moderna, Volume 11*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>225</sup> Caruth, C. (1996) *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 10-24.

<sup>226</sup> Sheftel, A. and Zembrzycki, S. (2010) 'Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with "Difficult" Stories', *The Oral History Review*, 37(2), pp. 191-214; Kis, O. (2006) p. 19; Passerini, L. (2017) 'Memories between silence and oblivion', in K. Hodgkin and S. Radstone (Eds.) *Memory History Nation* Routledge, pp. 238-254.

<sup>227</sup> Desbois, P. (2018) *In Broad Daylight: The Secret Procedures Behind the Holocaust by Bullets*. Arcade.

Knowing how to work with Soviet bureaucratic language, also known as *novoyaz* (newspeak), is a requirement for dealing with both archival documents and oral history.<sup>228</sup> Stalin's repression policy led to everything that Soviet citizens discussed largely being divided into two categories: things that could be addressed in public relatively safely, and things that were not wise to discuss even with close relatives.<sup>229</sup> Consequently, any opinion that could draw unwanted attention was being hidden behind various linguistic constructs (such as ideologemes, euphemisms ).<sup>230</sup> However, the language itself transformed as the vocabulary expanded with new words reflecting the realities of life in the Soviet Union (*kolkhoz* -collective farm, *sovkhos* – Soviet farm, *piatiletka* – a five-year plan for the Soviet economy), while some old ones gained new meaning (*tovarisch* – previously *deputy*, now – a form of greeting). Many abbreviations sometimes reached the level of absurdity.<sup>231</sup> It is important to note that the Russian language became the lingua franca of empire-wide communication and a factor of unity.<sup>232</sup> Nevertheless, the same principles were applied to the languages of the Soviet republics, including Ukrainian.

Oral history is a controversial type of evidence. Therefore, all these factors have to be considered while working with documents from that era, so it is crucially important to understand the historical context and critical analysis combined with cross-referencing facts from various sources.

Oral history can provide unique and very detailed information regarding events of the Holocaust era not available from other resources. However, due to those specifics, scholars need to clearly understand what information is realistic to be obtained from spectators and use critical analysis and other types of sources for verifications/correct interpretations.

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<sup>228</sup> Stiazhkina, O. (2019) *Styghma okupatsii: Radians'ki zhinky u samobachenni 1940-h rokiv*. Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, pp. 25-26.

<sup>229</sup> Fitzpatric Sh. (2008). *Povsednevnyi stalinizm. Sotsial'naya istoriya Sovetskoi Rossii v 30-e gody: gorod*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, pp. 197-227.

<sup>230</sup> Masenko, L.. (2017) *Mova radians'kogo totalitaryzmu*. Kyiv: Klio, pp. 10-43.

<sup>231</sup> Kupina, N. (1995) *Totalitarnyi yazyk: slovar' i recevye reaktsii*. Ekaterinburg – Perm': Izdatel'stvo Ural'skogo universiteta, pp. 6-52.

<sup>232</sup> Masenko, L.. (2017), p. 13.

### 3.2. Fieldwork data collection

The fieldwork phase is a key to this project. Archaeological surveys in Slavuta were employed for searching unknown mass graves and verification of data collected during previous forensic investigations in 1944 (see fieldwork supporting documents in Appendix B). It should be noted that even though recent studies include a much more comprehensive range of archaeological methods, this section only considers those that were actually used for data collection for this study.

#### 3.2.1. Walkover survey

A walkover survey is one of the most critical steps of fieldwork investigation.<sup>233</sup> This method provides an opportunity to survey the site to determine: ground conditions, landscape features (presence of hills or depressions, water objects), the amount of vegetation present, the presence of taphonomic markers and building remains etc. Data collection during this survey allowed the most suitable methods to be selected for further investigation and, in cases where there are plans to investigate a large territory, a way to determine the most promising locations will reduce time and resources for this investigation.

For this doctoral project, this method is aimed to estimate the type and size of the area in Slavuta where the survey would be taking place, since the territory targeted for investigation was considerable and varied in terms of landscape. The aims of fieldwork in Slavuta were: (1) to establish or disprove the existence of burials that were reportedly found within the former campsite (2) to establish approximate borders of the camp cemeteries and to match with existing ones (3) to verify information collected by the Extraordinary Commission, regarding the Jewish mass graves near the Water Tower. The task, therefore, was not to survey the entire territory. Instead, a decision was made to set grids for subsequent GPR survey in locations that could provide the most information (near former barracks and the Water Tower ).

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<sup>233</sup> Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2010) Available at: <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022; Dupras, T., et al. (2006) *Forensic Recovery of Human Remains. Archaeological Approaches*. CRP Press.

In order to achieve that, it was necessary to find spots with the least number of factors that would influence the data obtained by GPR (for example, those without thick vegetation (trees, bushes) and those with a relatively flat landscape). The landscape was also analysed as it was established that there was a military training field at the site that was used throughout wartime until the beginning of the 2010s. During a walkover survey, an estimation was made on how critical changes in the landscape could be for further analysis and data interpretation. Another critical aspect of conducting a walkover survey was to record signs that would indicate potential burials on that territory (described in the section below).

Another important part of the walkover survey is taking photos and videos of the site. These records of important details of the sites (e.g. topographic features, tephonomic indicators, general view of the site from different angles) assist with subsequent interpretation of archaeology-derived data. Moreover, photos and videos were taken in different seasons of the year, weather conditions and times of day, allowing to identify of new signs of possible features (e.g. walkover survey in winter time cannot identify any changes in vegetation).

### 3.2.2. Forensic taphonomy

The term 'taphonomy' was introduced by Efremov in 1940 to describe science that studies the patterns of a transformation of organic remains from the biosphere to the lithosphere.<sup>234</sup> Unlike palaeontology which explores the transformation of remains into fossils; forensic taphonomy focuses on studying changes to the human body due to traumatic, perimortem and post-mortem processes.<sup>235</sup> This is an important component of criminal proceedings which allows estimating time since death, for example. At present, the meaning of this term has expanded significantly, and the potential of the study of taphonomy is realised in archaeological studies.<sup>236</sup> Since taphonomy processes are reflected in the surrounding environment and can be used as markers for the potential discovery of burials.<sup>237</sup> For instance,

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<sup>234</sup> Efremov, I. (1940) 'Taphonomy: new branch of palaeontology', *Pan American Geologist* 74, pp. 81-93; Efremov, I. (1950) *Tafonomiya I geologicheskaya letopis*. Kniga 1. Moscow – Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSR.

<sup>235</sup> Ubelaker, D. (1997) 'Taphonomic Applications in Forensic Anthropology', in M. Sorg and W. Haglund *Forensic Taphonomy The Postmortem Fate of Human Remains*. CRC Press, pp. 77-90.

<sup>236</sup> Sturdy Colls, C.. (2015) pp. 152-156.

<sup>237</sup> Killam, E.. (2004) *The Detection of Human Remains*. Charles C. Thomas Publisher, pp. 32-34.

human decomposition can show markers of a possible burial site on the surface such as thicker vegetation (due to changes in the chemical composition of soil even decades after burial was done) and depressions of soil (related to the process of soft tissue decomposition).<sup>238</sup> The identification of subsurface features indicating of a possible mass grave in Slavuta near the Water Tower, was one of the reasons for the site selection of the forthcoming geophysical survey. During the walkover survey, a concentration of mounds and ruderal vegetation was found at one particular location. These markers helped narrow down the search area during fieldwork data collection.

In addition, earlier studies of mass graves are also reviewed in this research. It should be noted that the knowledge-based in forensic taphonomy has significantly increased compared to what was available to Soviet forensic medics employed by the Extraordinary Commission. However, the availability of descriptions of corpse conditions and crime scenes allows for re-evaluating previous data. The experience of Soviet forensic medical specialists is represented in several publications that were issued to both just before the beginning of the war between the USSR and the Third Reich, and shortly after its conclusion.<sup>239</sup> These publications describe knowledge accumulated by a practical experience of observing changes in the body after death, manner and causes of death, trauma analysis. In cases where reports on uncovering/ exhuming Nazi victims contain contradictory or incomplete data, working with forensic medicine theory available in the 1940s allows reconstruction of these tragic events more accurately.

### 3.2.3. Topographic survey

Archaeological surveys need to include detailed mapping. Modern landscape survey technologies allow this task to be completed quickly and extremely accurately. A first critical

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<sup>238</sup> For further information: Hunter, J. and Cox M. (2005), pp.29-32; Hochrein, M. (2002) 'An Autopsy of the Grave: Recognizing, Collecting, and Preserving Forensic Geotaphonomic Evidence', in W. Haglund, & M. Sorg, (Eds.) *Advances in Forensic Taphonomy: Method, Theory, and Archaeological Perspectives*. CRC Press, pp. 85-86; Damann, F. and Carter, D. (2010), pp. 37-49.

<sup>239</sup> Popov, N. (ed.), (1938). *Osnovy sudebnoi meditsyny*. Manual. Moscow-Leningrad: Medgiz; Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940) *Pervichnyi osmotr trupa na meste ego obnaruzheniya*. Kyiv: Ukrainskii institute yuridicheskikh nauk; Popov, N. (1946) *Uchebnik sudebnoi meditsyny*. Moscow: Medgiz; Raikii, M. (1953). *Sudebnaya meditsyna*. Moscow: Medgiz.



task is to record reference points on the landscape.<sup>240</sup> Looking forward, this helps in a number of ways: (1) marking the positions of identified features, (2) data comparison and analysis, (3) it makes possible the identification of the survey site later (for instance, when fieldwork is extended over the period of several years).

### 3.2.3.1. Total Station survey

This study utilised a Leica TS06 Total Station for a topographical survey. It is probably one of the most frequently used instruments for recording archaeological sites.<sup>241</sup>

Total Station combines a theodolite (an instrument for measuring angles on x- and y-axis), a rangefinder (an instrument that determines the distance from a viewer to an object) and a computer. The instrument has a notion of x- and y-axes. The instrument itself represents the centre of that virtual axis and sends out a laser beam reflected in a particular device called a prism. The computer calculates the speed of return of the beam and transposes elapsed time into the distance to the object.<sup>242</sup>

There are two critical requirements for conducting this type of survey: 1) a correct setup of the equipment in order to minimise calculation errors. It is also advisable for the same reason to perform all measures from the same spot. If several surveys need to be performed on a large territory, it is critically important to set the reference points that can be used to align different surveys on a single map. An example of such a reference point would be a relatively immobile object (building, monument, free-standing tree). The same idea applies to the use of other topographical methods. 2) enough open space for the beam to reflect in the device without any interference.

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<sup>240</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) p. 157; Greene, K. and Moore, T. (2010) p. 58.

<sup>241</sup> Howard, Ph. (2006) *Archaeological Surveying and Mapping Recording and Depicting the Landscape*. Routledge.

<sup>242</sup> Bettess, F. (1984) *Surveying for archaeologists*. Penschaw Press, pp 118-120 and 124-127; Zaitseva, O., and Pushkariov, A. (2010) *Takheometrisheskaya ciemka varheologicheskikh issledovaniyah*. Novosibirsk: Sibirskaya arheologicheskaya polevaya shkola.

The instrument creates an electronic draft of the topographic model of the site in the appropriate scale. Later, during the post-development phase, a software package can be transformed into the area map with all of the features discovered during the survey. In this study, data management was performed in CAD and ESRI ArcGIS 10.7 (a type of geographic information system for collection, storage, analysis and graphical visualisation of spatial and geographic data and related information on surveyed objects).<sup>243</sup>

It should be noted that generally, this type of survey is difficult to apply for large-scale recording (especially when there are many features present at the site). However, there are several significant benefits to using this method: high accuracy (minimal errors on easily accessed (open) and flat surfaces), the opportunity to use in areas with poor signal coverage (such as areas covered by thick and high vegetation or next to high-voltage power lines), and the opportunity to record locations of objects that are in remarkably close proximity of each other.

Interestingly, the Extraordinary Commission also used landscape survey in their earlier work in Slavuta but, naturally, it was far from the precision that can be achieved today with innovative technologies. One of the essential tasks of the study is the analysis of the accuracy of that data and comparison with those obtained during the fieldwork completed as part of this doctoral study.

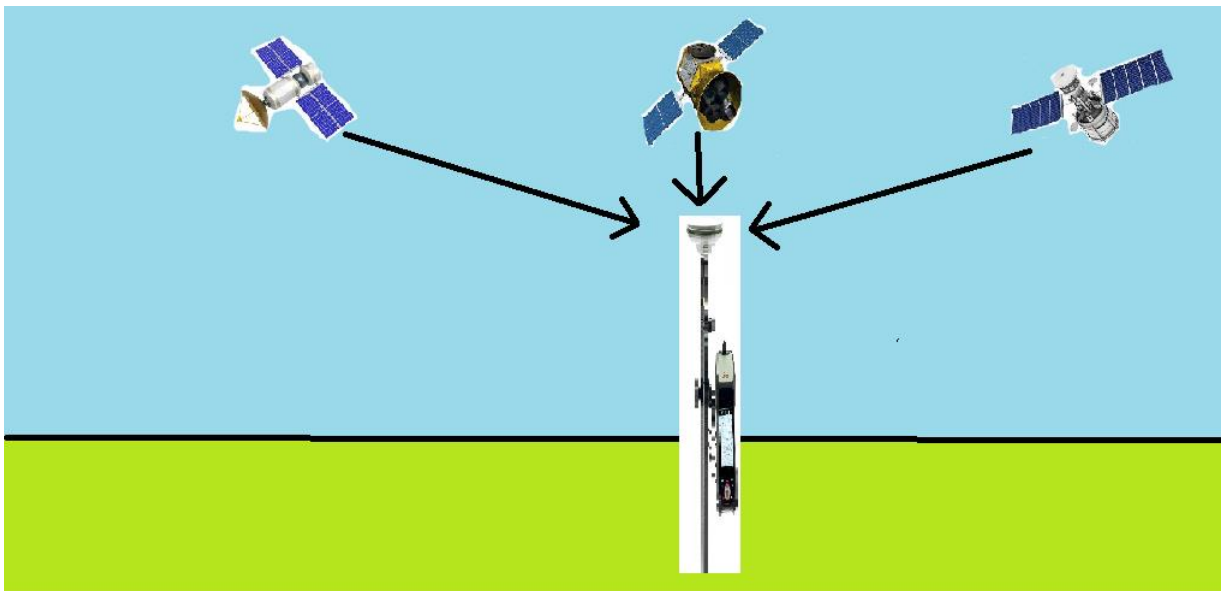
#### 3.2.3.2. *Global Navigation Satellite System*

There were also reference points gathered using the global navigation satellite system (GNSS) during the topographic data collection phase. The aim of this method, as with total station surveying, is to establish the geographical coordinates (location) of one or multiple objects. (Fig. 3.2.) However, in this case, data used for measurements comes from satellites that collect geolocation and time information data for the entire planet as part of the Global Positioning System (the most commonly used type of global navigation satellite system). The principle

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<sup>243</sup> For more details, see: Conolly, J. (2006) *Geographical Information System in Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Liu Guo, J. and Mason, Ph. (2009) 'Geographical Information Systems', in J. Liu Guo, Ph. Mason (Eds) *Essential Image processing and GIS for Remote Sensing*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc, pp.135-140; Chainey, S. and Ratcliffe, J. (2006) *GIS and crime mapping*. Chichester: Wiley. pp. 37 – 76.

operation of this system is that the position of satellites that are part of this system is known for any particular point in time and is recorded in the almanac (a table of their locations), which is stored in the receiver. An object's location is determined by measuring the distance from the object to several satellites by emitting a radio wave. This calculation is based on the fact that the speed of a radio wave is a known constant. The distance is calculated based on the time of emittance of a signal and the time of its reception.<sup>244</sup> In order to obtain data from this system, one needs a GPS receiver (Satellite navigator device). It is available to anyone who uses a smartphone.<sup>245</sup>



*Fig 3.2. Data collection with GNSS technology (drew by author)*

However, data collected during fieldwork requires much more precise data that can be obtained from a phone-based GPS receiver. Therefore, differential kinematic GPS is used: a system of amplification of GNSS signals that minimises errors during data collection.<sup>246</sup> Leica Zeno 20 was used for fieldwork in Slavuta. Unlike total station surveying, this method is

<sup>244</sup> Betters, F. (1984) pp. 133-135.

<sup>245</sup> McCoy, M. and Ladefoged, T. (2009) 'New Developments in the Use of Spatial Technology in Archaeology', *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 17 (3), p. 274.

<sup>246</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) p. 157; Ainsworth, S. and Thomason, B. (2003) 'Where on Earth Are We? The Global Positioning System (GPS)', *In Archaeological Field Survey*. English Heritage Technical Paper. Swindon.

suitable for creating an electronic plan of a large area. It was also possible to mark all locations of GPR surveying and other topographical features on the same plan.

### 3.2.4. Geophysical methods

Geophysical methods are widely used in forensic archaeology to detect the presence of buried remains.<sup>247</sup> There are multiple equipment types that detect different characteristics: Earth Resistance survey (based on electrical resistivity), magnetic survey methods (based on and recording changes in the earth's magnetic field and checking for the presence of magnetic minerals; the most used method for locating fired clay features, for example), metal detecting, and thermography (IRT).<sup>248</sup> Sturdy Colls has written about the use of different geophysics methods for studying Holocaust sites and this study employed Ground Penetration Radar (GPR) for fieldwork in Slavuta based on the outcomes of this study.<sup>249</sup>

#### 3.2.4.1. Ground Penetration Radar

Ground Penetration Radar (GPR) survey is one of several geophysical methods. It identifies the electrical properties (dielectric permittivity and conductivity) of soil or other materials beneath the surface. (Fig.3.3.) In fact, GPR highlights the contrast between the electric properties of soil and features within it.<sup>250</sup> GPR systems consist of both transmitting and receiving antennas. The transmitter generates a pulse of radio waves, whilst the receiver detects the return of the signal. This allows the depth at which a feature exists to be identified as well as its shape and dimensions.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Cheetham, P. (2005). 'Forensic geophysical survey', in J. Hunter, and M. Cox *Forensic archaeology: a textbook*, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp 62-95; Sala, R. Garcia, E., and Tamba, R (2012) 'Archaeological geophysics from basics to Perspective', in I. Ollich-Castanyer, (Ed.) *Archaeology, New Approaches in Theory and Techniques*. pp.137 – 144; Witten, A. (2006) *Handbook of Geophysics in Archaeology*. London: Routledge.

<sup>248</sup> Renfrew, C. and Bahn, P. (2012) *Archaeology: theories, methods and practice*. Thames and Hudson Ltd, pp 98 – 99; Greene, K. and Moore, T. (2010) pp 72-78.

<sup>249</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) pp 171 -181

<sup>250</sup> Watters M. and Hunter J. R. (2004) 'Geophysics and burials: field experience and software development', in K. Pye, D. Croft & Geological Society of London. *Forensic geoscience: principles, techniques and applications*. London, pp. 22- 23.

<sup>251</sup> Ruffell, A., et al (2008) *Geoforensics*, Chichester: John Wiley, p. 77; Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) p. 172

Different frequency antennas allow features at different depths to be recorded.<sup>252</sup> It means that low frequencies (15-50 MHz) are the most suitable for deep searching (mostly for large features) and high frequencies (350-1000 MHz) provide better resolution for shallow layers (between c. 0m-5m beneath the surface). It needs to be mentioned that it is difficult to identify human remains, especially skeletal remains, using GPR.<sup>253</sup> This method is usually used for identifying the disturbance caused by a potential burial site, rather than the body itself.<sup>254</sup> However, some recent studies began to try identify human remains with the assistance of geophysics.<sup>255</sup> In some cases, the presence of burial structures (tombstones, sarcophaguses) or caskets might be recorded. Unfortunately, in the case of this study at Slavuta, archival sources suggested that none of these is likely to be found. Therefore, the success of the survey will be dependent upon the ability of the method to detect the disturbance caused by burials.

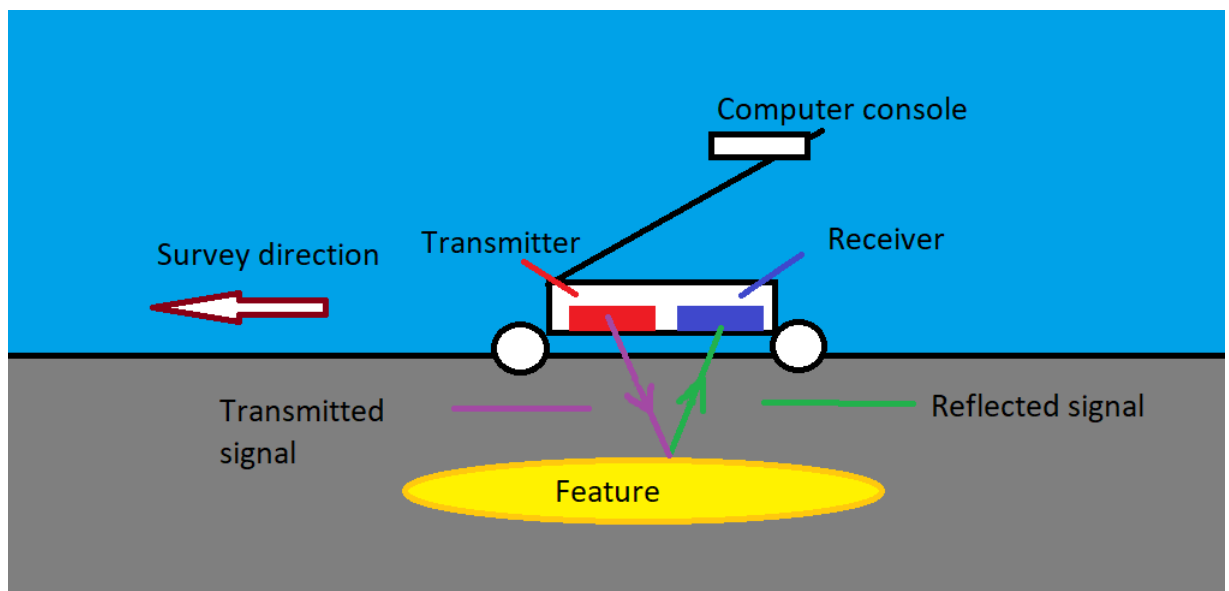


Fig 3.3. The principle of Ground Penetration Radar (drew by author)

<sup>252</sup> Hunter, J. (2013) *Forensic approaches to buried remains*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, p. 53-54.

<sup>253</sup> Hunter, J. (2013) p. 54; Sturdy Colls, C.(2015) pp. 180-181.

<sup>254</sup> Schultz, J. (2012) *Detecting buried remains using ground penetrating radar*. Available at: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/detecting-buried-remains-using-ground-penetrating-radar> . (Accessed on: 16 December 2022); Bevan, B. (1991), pp. 1310–1319; Ruffell, A., et al (2009) 'Location and Assessment of an Historic (150-160 years old) Mass Grave Using Geographic and Ground Penetrating Radar Investigation, NW Ireland', *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 54 (2), pp. 382–394.

<sup>255</sup> Rubio-Melendi, D., et al. (2018) 'GPR and ERT detection and characterization of a mass burial, Spanish Civil War, Northern Spain.' *Forensic Sci Int*, vol. 287, pp. e1-e9; Pringle, J. et al. (2020) 'Geophysical monitoring of simulated homicide burials for forensic investigations', *Scientific reports*, 10(1), pp. 1-12.

The methodology to conduct the survey in Slavuta drew inspiration from The Holocaust Landscapes Project and other projects carried out by the team of the Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University (led by prof. Sturdy Colls).<sup>256</sup> The fieldwork was set using the methods mentioned above (desk-based assessment, walkover survey, identification of possible taphonomy markers), which allowed the most probable locations of mass burials (Jewish mass graves near the Water Tower and possible burials within the PoW campscape) to be established. The GPR survey allowed data collection to take place on a large territory and soil disturbances to be detected (as well as information about their shapes, measurements, configuration) that are the key identifications of mass graves during subsequent data analysis.<sup>257</sup> Another key aspect is that non-invasive techniques (e.g., GPR) were allowed whilst conducting this fieldwork survey within ethical and religious norms described in Chapter 2. Whilst the excavation process is fundamentally destructive, the application of GPR is an example of a non-destructive technique that assists in the preservation of the site, both from museumification and commemorative standpoints.<sup>258</sup>

### 3.2.5. Data analysis

The nature of research produced various types of data which involve non-identical forms of analysis. The qualitative data from archival collection and witness testimonies were analysed, translated where needed, and developed as part of desk-based assessment before and after fieldwork. The critical principles while working with documents were objectivity and verification of facts by cross-referencing with other sources.

One of the verification methods was processing and visualisation of topographical survey data using Geographical Information System (GIS) (Fig.3.4.). The development of GIS in

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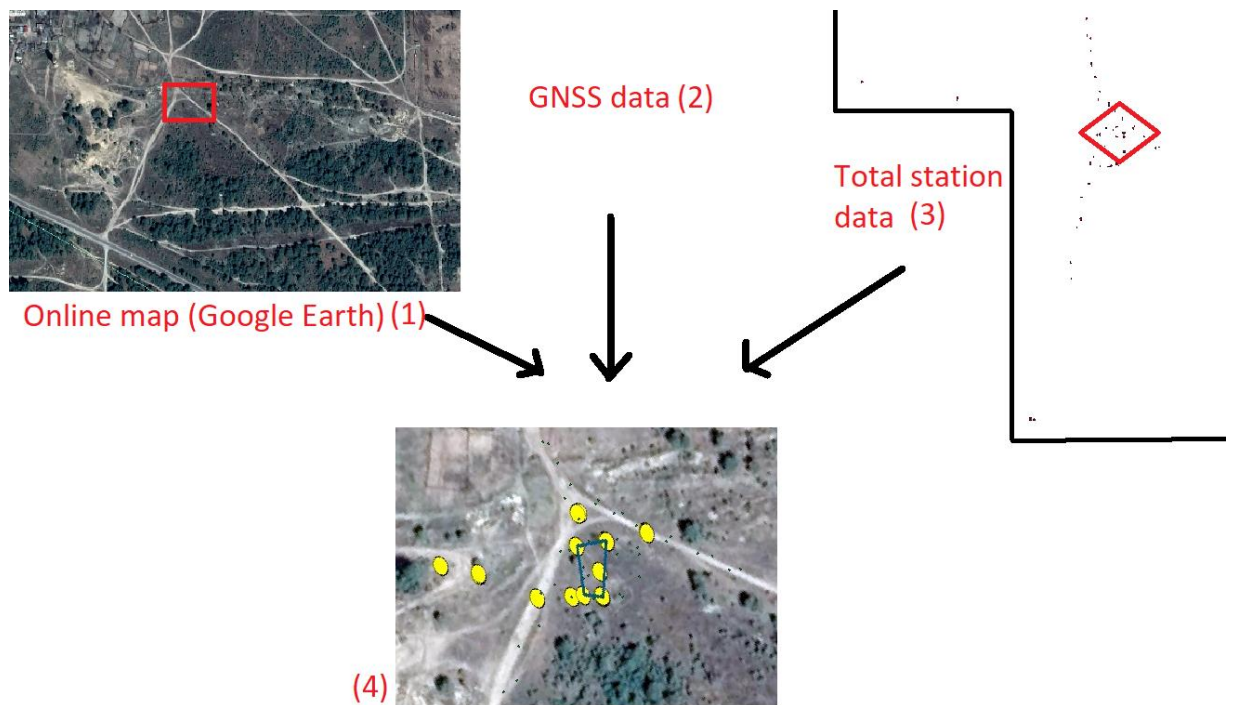
<sup>256</sup>Holocaust Landscape Project (website). Available at: <http://blogs.staffs.ac.uk/archaeology/projects/holocaust-landscapes/> (Accessed 02 December 2019); *Rohatyn Jewish Heritage* (web page); Protecting memory (2019).

<sup>257</sup>Hunter, J. and Cox, M. (2005) pp. 89-90; Hunter, J., Simpson, B., Sturdy Colls, C. (2013) p. 50; Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) pp. 185-186.

NB: all information about GPR system and the antenna selected for GPR survey in Slavuta and all details about GPR grid configuration and parameters are mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>258</sup> Hunter, J., Simpson, B., Sturdy Colls, C. (2013) p. 138.

archaeological investigation allowed the analysis the archaeological and environmental data alongside maps, and to establish relationships between them.<sup>259</sup> GIS is not the only way for doing topographical analysis, but it is a helpful toolbox for this purpose. For instance, this technology provided a method for digitising some maps and plans, converting survey data and subsequent manipulations, such as creating multiple layers for comparison and feature identification.



*Fig. 3.4. Example of processing of topographical survey data for forthcoming geophysical data analysis. Red squares, (1) and (3) represent the area depicted on (4), yellow circles on (4) correspond to GNSS data; green dots – Total station data; green square – GPR survey grid). Drawn by author.*

In order to complete this task, ArcGIS and also Google Earth software were used for creating an exact map of the area where fieldwork took place. Also, georectification of historical maps and plans on top of the present-day maps and satellite data could be carried out to a high degree of accuracy (even considering the margin of error in historical documents) to determine places of burial sites, which were established in case studies of Slavuta.

<sup>259</sup> Greene, K. and Moore, T. (2010), p. 54.

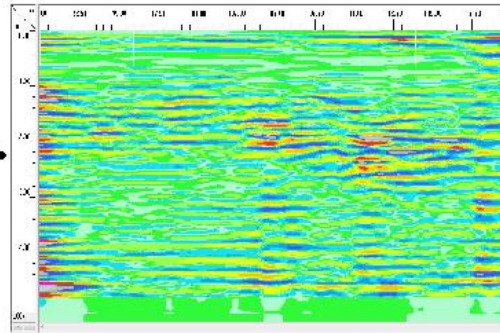
Processing and visualisation of the geophysical survey data were done using RADAN 7 software (Fig. 3.5.). During this stage, 3D models of grids in Slavuta were created. A list of identified anomalies was created during the analysis of time and depth slices. Further information about specific data processing steps and interpretation of the results is provided in Chapters 5 and 6.



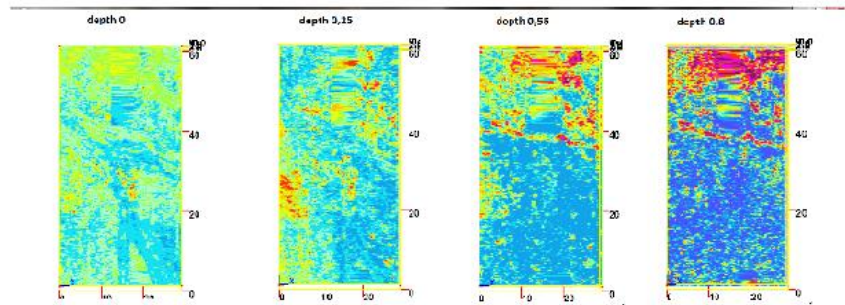
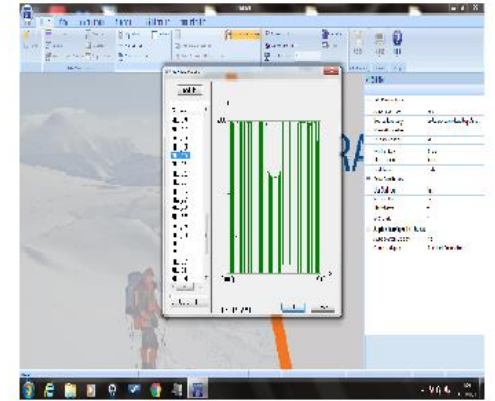
data collection



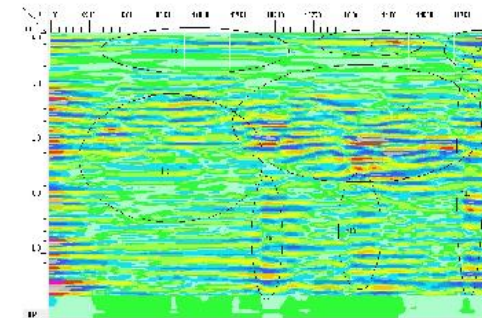
download data



data assembling + processing



identification of anomalies on 3d model



identification of anomalies on 2d profiles

Fig. 3.5. GPR data processing (drawn by the author)

Comparison and unification of historical, topographical, and archaeological data allowed to structural analysis of the surrounding environment to be performed and potential mass graves in the Slavuta region to be identified. The analysis of reports of the previous investigations assisted in providing a more accurate interpretation of the results.

### **3.3. Method and site selection**

The methods discussed above were used for each case study at different phases and levels of investigation. Furthermore, the surrounding environment, nature, and types of remains played an important role.<sup>260</sup> Desk-based phases were completed for all case studies included in this thesis. However, this stage had many dependencies based on the availability and accessibility of archival documents. Methods used during fieldwork were selected based on their suitability for particular terrain, the likely nature of the archaeological features present, and their availability from the Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University.<sup>261</sup>

The author selected two places on the territory of modern Ukraine as case studies: Slavuta (Khmelnitski region) with two different types of Holocaust sites (mass graves of local Jews and cemeteries of the Soviet PoWs) and Busk (Lviv region, already described in Chapter 2 for illustrating the most common approach for the application of archaeological methods in Ukraine) (Fig. 3.6.). To demonstrate the practical application of theoretical principles of forensic medicine by the Extraordinary Commission, a case study in sovkhos Krasnyi in the Crimea, was selected. Furthermore, these cities have a variety of sites related to the Holocaust:

- PoW camps (Slavuta);
- Concentration camp (sovkhos Krasnyi);
- Ghettos (Slavuta, Busk);

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<sup>260</sup> Cole, T. (2018).

<sup>261</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2015), ch 6.

- Mass graves of Jewish victims of the Holocaust (Slavuta, Busk);
- Mass graves of non-Jewish civilians (Slavuta, sovkhos Krasnyi);
- Mass graves of PoW (Slavuta).

These sites were identified to check for additional information in order to evaluate the potential for application of different strategies of mass grave investigation (archaeological excavation, topographical survey, employing geophysical methods). In addition, a wide range of other types of sources available for these places (the Extraordinary Commission reports, witness testimonies and archival documents) were used.

Later, while working with published research, cartographical and visual sources, site visits were conducted. Before choosing the sites with most potential for this research, site visits were undertaken in Berdychiv (8<sup>th</sup> July 2018, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2019, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019), Slavuta (7<sup>th</sup> October 2018, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020), Izyaslav (7<sup>th</sup> October 2018), Pechera (29<sup>th</sup> June 2019) and Ozarintsy (30<sup>th</sup> June 2019)<sup>262</sup> (see Appendix A) to identify current ground conditions and appropriate archaeological methods during future work. After site visits and discussions with supervisors, it was decided to conduct fieldwork in Slavuta as the most perspective and appropriate for archaeological investigation sites.

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<sup>262</sup> Besides Ozarintsy it was also decided to visit Pechera, as it was the location of a concentration camp named 'Death loop,' that was probably sourced by Jewish prisoners from Ozarintsy.



Fig.3.6. Map of present-day Ukraine with territories marked by different zones of occupation during WWII. Red dots marked the case site location<sup>263</sup>

### 3.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the interdisciplinary approach undertaken throughout this research. The method's diversity allowed to bring together various data (archaeologic-derived, historical, eyewitness statements, forensic evidence recorded during previous investigations) to address the aim and objectives of this doctoral research effectively. The methodology was presented through several stages, including desk-based investigations, forensic archaeological fieldwork, data analysis and interpretation. The diversity of these methods addresses archival and archaeologic-derived data that were analysed and interpreted using a broad range of methods and their combinations. This interdisciplinary approach provides an opportunity to get more information from previous investigations, and material remains (mostly mass graves) of the Holocaust era. Moreover, this thesis focuses on Ukrainian-specific factors and context and proposes to revise the traditional approach for the application of archaeological and forensic archaeological methods in this country.

<sup>263</sup> Ukrainian Crisis Media Center (2017) *Map of present-day Ukraine with territories marked by different zones of occupation during WWII*. Available at: <https://uacrisis.org/en/59920-world-war-ii-ukraine-part-one-war-four-starting-dates-ukrainians>. (Accessed on: 16 December 2022)

## 4. The Extraordinary Commission

*All evidence [obtained by the Extraordinary Commission] was painted with bright colours the dark scene of the atrocities committed against innocent people by scounders - fascist criminals*

*Yu. Sapozhnikov, 1963, Kyiv*

### 4.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, before WWII, humanity had not encountered the concept of *genocide* as a legal term. The Soviet Union should have been the first state where this legal concept was included in the legislative system, due to the widespread involvement of the Soviet legal and medico-legal experts in investigations and trials of these crimes. This would have allowed Stalin to highlight the progressive and democratic intentions of the Soviet regime. According to Hirsch, implementing a new concept for international law, *International Crimes against Peace and Humanity*, to the Soviet legislation had a substantial propaganda effect.<sup>264</sup> In her recent monography, she highlighted that Stalin was aware of the propaganda value of an international tribunal versus punishment by executive decree, after the Moscow Trials against his main political opponents Kamenev, Bukharin and other well-known Bolsheviks who stayed in the USSR in 1936 -1938.<sup>265</sup> For the Soviet authorities, the International Military Tribunal had to (1) switch focus from Stalin's crimes to those committed by Nazis, (2) raise the patriotic spirit of the Soviet people.

However, a similar strategy had also been used by the Nazis in the occupied territories, as they were conducting investigations at sites associated with Soviet repressions (prisons, killing sites,

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<sup>264</sup> Hirsch, F. (2008) 'The Soviets at Nuremberg: International Law, Propaganda, and the Making of the Postwar Order', *The American Historical Review*, 113, no. 3, p.728.

<sup>265</sup> Hirsch, F. (2020) *Soviet Judgment at Nuremberg: A New History of the International Military Tribunal After World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 27.

mass graves).<sup>266</sup> Plate 4.1. demonstrates an example of uncovering the mass grave by German experts. Ironically, it was German forensic medicine methodology that became the foundation of the Soviet one. As a result, there are a lot of similarities in techniques, methods and interpretations that can be noted while reading reports of Nazi and Soviet specialists.<sup>267</sup> However, the critical differences between Soviet and Nazi research are: (1) the conclusions of Soviet experts became the foundation of court proceedings later (see Introduction), (2) they had a more systematic nature and were conducted in a large number of places. Nevertheless, the investigations of Soviet war crimes conducted by Nazis and their Allies also require further review with the benefit of modern forensic science knowledge.

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<sup>266</sup> Struve, K. (2018); *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Winniza (1944)*, Paperno, I. (2001). pp.99-118; Strel'nykovich, S. (2014). pp.277-285; *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Katyn (1943)*, *Stenogramma zasedaniya* (1944). pp. 479-481; Sorokina, M. (2010). pp. 155-173; Stahl, Z. (1965) pp. 114-125.

NB: Nevertheless, the investigations of Soviet war crimes conducted by Nazis and their Allies also require further review with the benefit of modern forensic science knowledge.

<sup>267</sup> For instance, Goffman, E. (1887) *Uchebnik sudebnoi meditsyny*. Sankt-Petersburg: tip. Dep. Udelov; Emmert, K.(1901) *Rukovodstvo sudebnoi meditsyny, soglasovannoye s germanskim, avstriiskim i bernskim zakonodatel'stvom*. Sankt-Petersburg: Prakticheskaya meditsyna These textbooks were recommended by Professor Popov, N. (1946) p. 592. Additionally, a significant number of German publications were the basic of Soviet textbooks e.g. Bokarius, N (1925).*Pervonachal'nyi naruzhnyi osmotr trupa pri militseiskom i rozysknom doznanii*. Kharkiv: Izdaniye Militsii I Ugolovnogo rozyska N.K.V.D. U.S.S.R, pp. XIII-XIV.



*Plate 4.1. German investigation in Vinnitsia (Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Winniza (1944).*

The earliest attempts to record the Nazi's atrocities in the USSR had been conducted whilst WWII was still ongoing. According to Al'tman, in the first months following the beginning of The Soviet – Nazi War (summer 1941), the collection of information about Nazi crimes on occupied territories was initiated by The Main Political Directorate of the Red Army and NKVD units (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs).<sup>268</sup> The first medico-legal investigations of these crimes were made right after the liberation of towns in the European part of the Russian Federation.<sup>269</sup>

For this purpose, two Commissions were set up in the USSR to investigate the German occupation, and to collect various materials and evidence: (1) the Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the Fascist German Invaders and their Accomplices, and of the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms,

<sup>268</sup> Al'tman, I. (2002) *Zhertvy nenavisti. Holokost v SSSR, 1941-1945 gg.* Moscow: fond "Kovcheg.", p. 386.

<sup>269</sup> Feferman, K. (2003) 'Soviet Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR: Documenting the Holocaust', *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, 4, pp. 588-589 also mentioned that the Red Army made attempts of recording Nazi atrocities before the establishment of the Extraordinary Commission. For example, acts and reports created by military personals, local authorities or activists were published in particular volume *Documenty obvinayut* (1943). Issue 1. Moscow: OGIZ; Gospolitizdat. However, there was only a describing of crimes in most cases. This is a reason this type of investigation was not included in this research.

Public Organisations, State Enterprises, and Institutions of the USSR (ChGK), referred to as *the Extraordinary Commission* later in the text, and (2) The Commission for the Great Patriotic War Studies.<sup>270</sup>

However, it is essential to note the main differences between the two Commissions. The Council of People's Commissars chartered the Extraordinary Commission as per official documents. Its purpose was to collect evidence of crimes committed by the Nazi regime and its Allies during the occupation, in order to seek monetary compensation for damages inflicted.<sup>271</sup> The Extraordinary Commission became the main investigatory body for Nazi crimes after the Nazi occupation. Crime reports from various towns were also used in additional criminal proceedings and investigations conducted later.<sup>272</sup> Furthermore, the Extraordinary Commission reports are one of the primary sources of Holocaust investigations in many places.

The Commission for Great Patriotic War Studies (Ukrainian branch) was chartered by the Academy of Sciences of Ukrainian SSR.<sup>273</sup> Its aim was mainly to collect propaganda materials on acts of bravery by Soviet citizens and members of the Red Army (for example, the memoirs and descriptions of the actions of Soviet partisans). The collected materials were later used for identifying acts of "inappropriate" behaviour during the occupation. These acts carried heavy penalties and often imprisonment.<sup>274</sup> In the Soviet Union, a person who remained in German-

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<sup>270</sup> NB: Great Patriotic War is a common term for describing the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941 – 9<sup>th</sup> May 1945).

<sup>271</sup> Discussion about Soviet claim regarding non-human war cost:

Millar, J. and Linz, S. (1980) 'The Cost of World War II to the Soviet People: A Reply', *The Journal of Economic History*, 40(4), p. 845; Linz, S. (1985) 'Foreign Aid and Soviet Postwar Recovery', *The Journal of Economic History*, 45(4), pp. 947-954; Moine, N. (2013) 'Fascists have destroyed the fruit of my honest work'. The Great Patriotic War, International Law and the Property of Soviet Citizens.' *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 61(2), pp. 172-195.

<sup>272</sup> NB: For instance: criminal proceedings of Shevket Shalovatov (USHMM/ RG-31.018M/ 20404/ vol. 39). The first investigation made by the Extraordinary Commission took place in April 1944 for exhumation of victims of Nazi death camp near sovkhos „Krasnyi“ near Simferopil (the Crimea). The second exhumation was made by Soviet forensics in November 1970.

<sup>273</sup> NB: Because this research focused on territory of Ukraine, for this reason the Ukrainian Commission is mentioned. The same Commission also existed at Academy of Science of USSR.

<sup>274</sup> NB: If a person were to be convicted of "inappropriate" behaviour during occupation, they could potentially be imprisoned and their relatives could be denied the opportunity to attend college or university, or their application to join the Communist Party could be declined (in which the Soviet framework could stifle one's career advancement). Participation in the partisan movement was equated to regular army service. Partisans were awarded medals and were admired as soldiers. As a result, the amount of people that claimed participation in the partisan movement greatly exceeded the number of actual partisans. The Commission was founded



occupied territories was branded as a potential "traitor to the Motherland" and suspected of collaboration with the enemy.<sup>275</sup> Therefore, a question about whether the person or their close relatives were present on occupied territories, was a mandatory part of any job application form until the 1990s.<sup>276</sup> Evidence of Nazi crimes was also often collected by this Commission in the course of their investigations.

There were frequent overlaps between the work of these two organisations. Several materials were collected by both Commissions and ended up in each of their collections (as shown in Fig. 4.1). Additionally, medico-legal investigations were frequently conducted by the Red Army medics. Considering these facts, these entities will be discussed below. Nevertheless, the primary focus of this chapter is the Extraordinary Commission and the archaeological methods that they used during their investigations (excavation and exhumation).

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specifically to verify these claims. An excellent example of a micro-historical study on that topic is an analysis of "Partisanka's diary" performed by Stiazhkina (2019).

The author demonstrates this, based on an analysis of "Soviet" language of Gubina from Chistiakovo Donetsk region, which meant for Soviet citizens, the current realities and the fear of repressions were worse than punishment for sabotage during occupation.

<sup>275</sup> Polian, P. (2002) *Zhertvy dvukh diktatur: Zhyzn', trud, unizheniye i smert' sovetskih voyennoplennykh i ostarbaiterov na chuzhbine i na rodine*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, pp. 73-75; Kudryashov, S. and Voisin, V. (2008) 'The early stages of "legal purges" in Soviet Russia (1941-1945)', *Cahiers du monde russe* 2-3 (Vol 49), pp.263-295.

<sup>276</sup> NB: this information appeared more than once in the author's conversations with older people.



Fig. 4.1. The circulation of the Extraordinary Commission papers.

To date, scholars who have studied the Extraordinary Commission's practices have taken one of three approaches, thus providing:

- A) A general overview of The Extraordinary Commission investigation: establishment of Commission, members, number of cases, aims and contribution analyses.<sup>277</sup>
- B) Studies based on a geographically defined approach: investigations in particular regions or of individual sites.<sup>278</sup>

<sup>277</sup> Sanders, M. (1995) *Extraordinary crimes in Ukraine: an examination of evidence collection by the Extraordinary State Commission of the U.S.S.R., 1942-1946*. Ohio University. PhD thesis; Sorokina, M. (2005); Poulsen, N. (2009) 'Rozsliduvannia voyennyh zlochyniv "po-soviets'ki". Krytychnyi analiz materialiv Nadzvychainoi derzhavnoi komisii', *Holokost i suchasnist'*, 1(5), pp. 27-46; Feferman, K. (2003); Yepifanov, A. (2017) 'Organizatsionnye i pravovye osnovy deyatel'nosti komissii po ustanovleniyui rassledovaniyu hitlerovskikh zlodzeyanii', *Pravovaya paradigma*, 16, No4, pp. 54-61.

<sup>278</sup>For example: Garrad, J. (1996) *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman*. Free Press about Berdychiv; Feferman, K. (2009) *Soviet Jewish Stepchild: The Holocaust in the Soviet Mindset, 1941-1964*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag pp. 36-32 about Kyiv investigation; Gaidashev, A. (2013) 'Chrezvychainaya gosudarstvennaya komissiya po rassledovaniyu zlodzeyanii nemetsko-fashystskikh zahvatchikov i ih soobschnikov v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny (na materialah Stalingradskoi oblasti)', *Vestnik Cheliabinskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, 6 (297), pp. 53-56 about Stalingrad region (now Voroshyllovgrad region, The

C) Research concerning specific crime categories: such as the non-human costs of war<sup>279</sup>, collaborators<sup>280</sup> and arson.<sup>281</sup>

This doctoral research proposes a new approach, which focuses on evaluating the methods employed by the Extraordinary Commission during their investigations: specifically mass grave identification, excavation, exhumation of corpses and the recording of their findings which followed. The contributions of the Extraordinary Commission's investigations should be reviewed based on modern knowledge in the fields of forensic taphonomy, forensic medicine, forensic anthropology and forensic archaeology. In accordance with this approach, this chapter is divided into two major parts: an overview of Soviet forensic medicine (predominately in Ukraine) before WWII and the medico-legal investigation of mass graves and killing sites in Extraordinary Commission practice. An examination of the mechanisms and aims of their excavation and exhumation procedures is then carried out to: establish the accuracy and completeness of their reports, and the implications of these findings for our understanding of mass graves of this period. This approach provides the opportunity to utilise the broadest range of sources (Fig. 4.2.) during the research, and to provide a more effective analysis of the Commission's investigations procedures, the methodology of which explains their results obtained. Furthermore, this theoretical base facilitates a practical interpretation of the Extraordinary Commission's reports regarding the case study of Slavuta discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

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Russian Federation); Butenko, Ye (2016) 'Sozdaniye I deyatel'nost' Chrezvychainoi Gosudarstvennoi Gosudarstvennoi komissii po rassledovaniyu zlodoyanii nemetsko-fashystskih zahvatchikov i ih soobschnikov (na materialah Kurskoi oblasti)', *Vestnik Brianskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, 1 (27), pp. 25-30 about Kursk region.

<sup>279</sup> Moine, N. (2013); Muharovs'ka, A. (2016) 'Diial'nist' derzhavnyh komisii schodo vstanovleniia luds'kyh vtrat, yakyh zaznala Volyns'ka oblast' u roky Drugoi svitovoi viiny', in M. Kucherepa (ed.) *Volyn' I volyniany u Drugii svitovii viini*. Lutsk, pp. 610-614; Sogdanova, Z. (2014) 'Uscherb narodnomu khoziaistvu Kalmytskoi ASSR, prichenennyi v period nemetskoi okkupatsii', *Oriental Studies*, 7 (4), pp. 62-68.

<sup>280</sup> Penter, T. (2008) 'Local Collaborators on Trial. Soviet war crimes trials under Stalin (1943-1953)', *Éditions de l'EHESS*, Vol. 49, No. 49/2-3, pp. 341-364; Cadiot, J and Penter, T. (2013) 'Law and Justice in Wartime and Postwar Stalinism', *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte. Osteuropas*, 61(2), pp. 161-171.

<sup>281</sup> Moine, N. and Angell, J. (2011) 'Defining "War Crimes against Humanity" in The Soviet Union.: Nazi arson of Soviet villages and the Soviet narrative on Jewish and non-Jewish Soviet war victims, 1941-1947', *Cahiers Du Monde Russe*, 52(2/3), pp. 441-473.

The major Collections of Extraordinary Commission reports

Published Extraordinary Commission reports

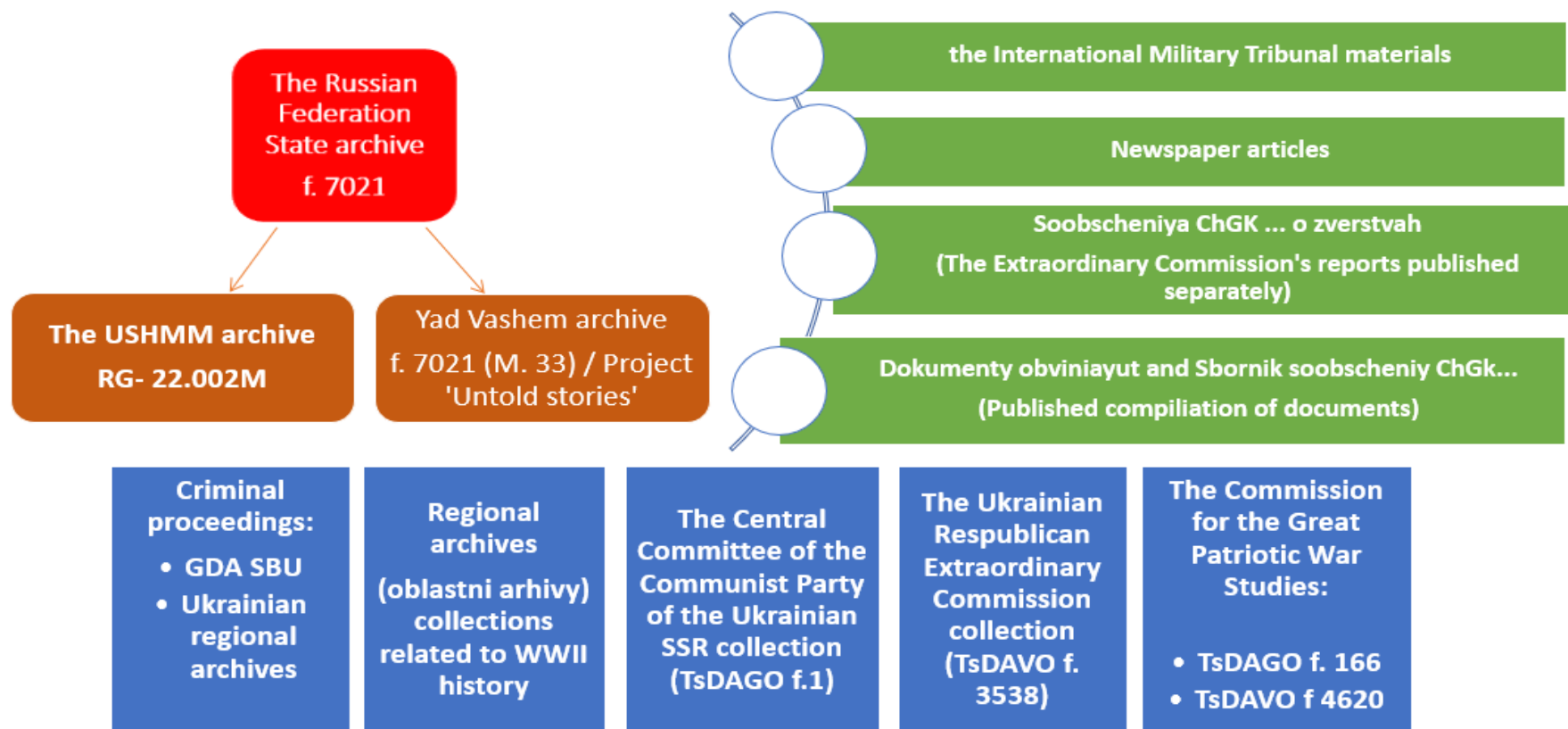


Fig 4.2. Archival collections and other sources where collected The Extraordinary Commission materials.

## 4.2. Forensic medicine in the Ukrainian SSR

The methods and capabilities of forensic medicine during WWII were vastly different from what is available today. Therefore, the purpose of this section of research is not to determine the accuracy of the results obtained (that will be discussed in other chapters) but to understand how data was collected and recorded.

### 4.2.1. Brief overview of the history of Ukrainian Soviet forensic medicine in the 1920s- 1940s

Even before WWII, there was an extensive network of forensic-medical expertise in the USSR that had clear instructions on how to conduct investigations. For example, Ukraine had four forensic medical laboratories: in Kharkiv (since 1920), in Odesa (since 1920)<sup>282</sup>, in Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro) (since 1928), and in Kyiv (since 1933).<sup>283</sup> Additionally, there were forensic medicine departments at Kharkiv, Odesa, Kyiv, and other medical institutes before WWII.<sup>284</sup> In contrast, the Russian SFSR did not have an institute for forensic medical research even after WWII, only forensic (Criminalistics) laboratories, while Ukraine had institutes in three cities: Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa.<sup>285</sup> After the capital was moved to Kyiv from Kharkiv in 1934, the title of chief Republic's forensic medical expert went to the Kyiv scientific community – the Head of Forensic Medicine at the Kyiv Medical Institute (now Bogomolets National Medical University) Voskoboinikov. However, the Forensic Medical Service in Ukraine was led by Sapozhnikov from 1937 to 1954.<sup>286</sup> After the annexation of Western Ukrainian territories in 1939, regional services were created in Lviv, Chernivtsi, Rivne, Ternopil, Volhynian, Drohobych

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<sup>282</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 120. [Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958.](#)

<sup>283</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 121. [Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958.](#)

<sup>284</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 122. [Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958.](#)

<sup>285</sup> TsDAVO f. 4764/ op. 2/ s. 20, p 4 [Academic paper: Sending material evidence for forensic expertise.](#)

<sup>286</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 3, p. 1 [Note regarding operating of the Main Medico-Legal expertise at the Ministry of Health, Ukrainian SSR; TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 122 Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958.](#)

and Stanislav (now Ivano-Frankivsk)<sup>287</sup>. This amount of newly founded institutions aligned very well with the policy of solidifying Soviet power on recently acquired territories. (Fig. 4.3.)

According to a memorandum by the People's Commissariat of Health on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1936, each hospital larger than 200 beds had to have a pathoanatomical department (Department of Anatomical Pathology).<sup>288</sup> Regarding the same memorandum, Medical Institutes for Advance Studies (Institutes of Professional Development) had to organise six-month training courses and refresher courses on anatomical pathology, primarily for rural doctors, but particularly for those where aforementioned departments were created.<sup>289</sup> The Department of Pathological Anatomy (prosectorium or dissecting room) had to conduct macro-and microscopic, bacteriological, and sometimes chemical tests of corpses, and a histological examination of surgical and biopsy samples. Some of the main tasks of that department were to establish a cause of death (mainly due to disease) when examining corpses. A separate note memorandum states that those hospitals that conducted forensic autopsies had to have additional staff, who had to be referred by the forensic medical service with approval from the hospital's medical director.<sup>290</sup> This is important because it was not always possible to involve forensic medical experts for the Extraordinary Commission's investigations, as described below. There was, however, infrastructure in place to conduct such investigations in almost all regions.

Many specialists were drafted into the army at the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet war. As part of the draft, they too drafted women that had medical training.<sup>291</sup> This was reflected in official

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<sup>287</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 123 [Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-Republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958.](#)

<sup>288</sup> TsDAVO f. 342 /op. 14/ s. 222, p. 96. [Warning Order of People Commissariat of Health Ukrainian SSR regarding pathological anatomy services at the hospital.](#)

<sup>289</sup> TsDAVO f. 342 /op. 14/ s. 222, p. 97 [Warning Order of People Commissariat of Health Ukrainian SSR regarding pathological anatomy services at the hospital.](#)

<sup>290</sup> TsDAVO f. 342 /op. 14/ s. 222, p. 98 [Warning Order of People Commissariat of Health Ukrainian SSR regarding pathological anatomy services at the hospital.](#)

<sup>291</sup> *Ukaz Prezidiuma VS SSSR o voyennom polozenii* (1941) Available at: [https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/%D0%A3%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7\\_%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B0\\_%D0%92%D0%A1\\_%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A0\\_%D0%BE%D1%82\\_22.06.1941\\_%D0%BE\\_%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC\\_%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B8](https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/%D0%A3%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7_%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B0_%D0%92%D0%A1_%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A0_%D0%BE%D1%82_22.06.1941_%D0%BE_%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC_%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B8) (Accessed on: 11 November 2021); *Zakon o*

reports, as they stated that most experts were drafted into the army, and only few of them remained on occupied territories.<sup>292</sup> The latter refers to those experts working in Western Ukraine, who either were not called up or got evacuated due to the rapid advancement of Wehrmacht forces. Some experts were evacuated<sup>293</sup>: for instance, Hamburg was in Cheliabinsk together with her husband, Sapozhnikov (Deputy Chief Forensic Medical Expert).<sup>294</sup> Forensic-medical expertise in the Ukrainian SSR was re-established at the end of 1943 (after returning from the evacuation of key personnel).<sup>295</sup> This date coincides with the liberation of Kyiv (officially 6<sup>th</sup> November 1943) and the time required for specialists to return from evacuation.

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*vseobschei voinskoi obiazannosti* (1939). Available at: <http://museumreforms.ru/node/13832> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

<sup>292</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 1, p. 17 **Medico-legal expertise in Ukrainian SSR and perspective of its development in 1949.**

<sup>293</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 124 **Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-Republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958.**

<sup>294</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 3, p. 1 **Note regarding operating of the Main Medico-Legal expertise at the Ministry of Health, Ukrainian SSR.**

<sup>295</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 124 **Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-Republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958.**

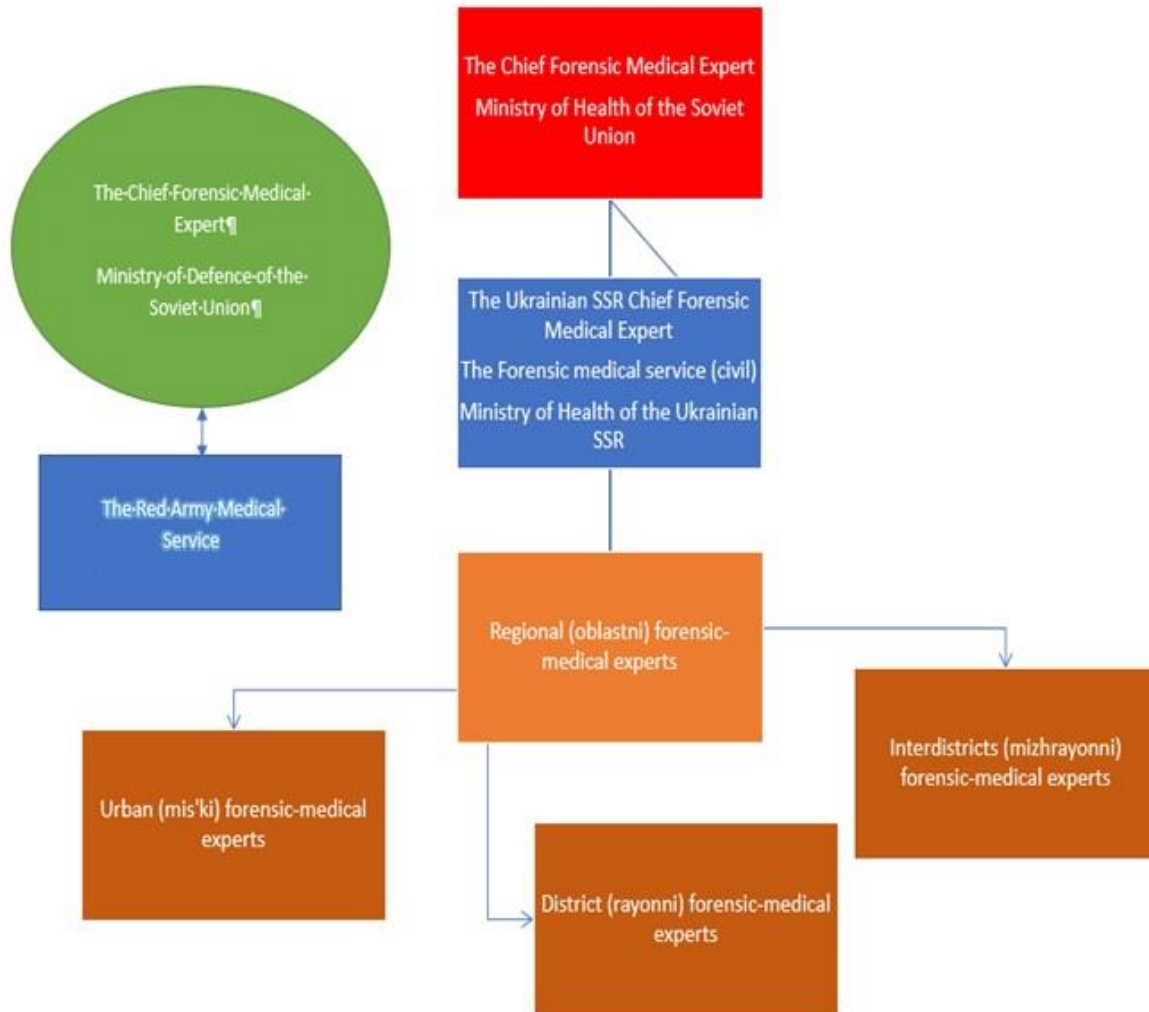


Fig. 4.3. System of Forensic medical service in Soviet Ukraine.<sup>296</sup>

In this context, it is also worth mentioning the changes in the Soviet Criminal process, due to the adoption of a new constitution in 1936 that later became known as Stalin's Constitution.<sup>297</sup> Huskey argued that many newly implemented standards were part of a broader "campaign to

<sup>296</sup> NB: due to transformation of Council of People's Commissars to Council of Ministers in 1946 People's Commissariats were rebranded as Ministries. Since the table represents a consolidated view of forensic medical service in USSR in 1940's, "ministry" is being used.

<sup>297</sup> *Konstitutsiya (Osnovnoi zakon) Soiuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik (1936)*. Available at <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/cnst1936.htm> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).



emphasise the educative and legitimising role of legal proceedings".<sup>298</sup> Of course, these changes were purely cosmetic, as the second half was during the peak of Stalin's repressions.<sup>299</sup> This was a significant push for infrastructural growth in the context of the development of Soviet forensic medical expertise.

Despite all the positive reports, the forensic medical service suffered from a severe shortage of qualified professionals. As of 1941, the Ukrainian SSR had 132 experts<sup>300</sup> that were covering a fairly sizeable territory (6-7 districts, sometimes up to 10<sup>301</sup>). That meant that by estimated calculations, each expert was covering approximately 330,000 – 385,000 people.<sup>302</sup> There were frequent non-staff experts involved (most likely, doctors and assisting medical personnel). According to official documents, each forensic medical expert had to cover 2-3 districts, or in the case of a large city: one expert per 100,000 individuals, which highlights the shortage once again.<sup>303</sup> The material base was also lacking – there were not enough equipped morgues, forensic medical laboratories, etc.<sup>304</sup> Still, some of the organisational shortfalls of

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<sup>298</sup> Huskey, E. (1986) *Russian lawyers and the Soviet state: the origins and development of the Soviet bar, 1917-1939*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 99.

<sup>299</sup> Konkvest, R. (2009) *Zhnyva skorboty. Radians'ka kolektyvizatsiya i Holodomor*. Kyiv: Teren pp.150-151; Arch-Getty, J. (1991) 'State and Society under Stalin: Constitutions and Elections in the 1930s', *Slavic Review*, 50(1), pp. 18-35; Arendt, H. (1973) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest/HBJ Book Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 318-324.

<sup>300</sup> The report of Yurii Sapozhnikov indicates the number of 150 forensic experts for 1941 (TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 1, p. 16 **Medico-legal expertise in Ukrainian SSR and perspective of its development in 1949**). Since the history of the forensic medical service is not the subject of this study and the difference in numbers is not very critical (perhaps he simply rounded it up), the calculations were made on the basis of the first indicators in order to illustrate the large workload on one expert.

<sup>301</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 1, p. 36 **Decision of Collegium of Ministry of Health of Ukrainian USSR regarding state of medico-legal expertise in Ukrainian SSR**.

<sup>302</sup> 736 districts in the Ukrainian SSR for 1<sup>st</sup> January 1941, divided by (the population in the Ukrainian SSR, according to the 1939 census: 30,960,221 people, along with the people of Western Ukrainian territories: about 8,000,000 people and approximately 1,565,000 people in the Izmil and Chernivtsi regions). The result shows the approximate number of residents in one district. The final product is the number of inhabitants in one district multiplied by 6 and 7). Statistics were taken at: *Administrativno-territorial'noe deleniye soiuznyh respublik SSSR na 1 yanvaria 1941* (1941) Moscow: Vedomosti Verkhovnogo soveta SSSR. This calculation does not pretend to be very accurate figures; it only shows the approximate number of people who accounted for one forensic expert to illustrate their high workload. The purpose of this study is not to analyse the demographic situation in the USSR and the correctness of the official data. However, the Soviet censuses are the subject of numerous discussions and criticism.

<sup>303</sup> *Postanovleniye SNK o merah ukrepleniya i razvitiya sudebno-meditsynskoi ekspertizy* (1939). Available at: <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/564289172> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022), part 4; TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 1, p. 7 **Memo regarding the state of medico-legal expertise in Ukrainian SSR**.

<sup>304</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 124 **Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-Republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958**.

their work can be attributed to a lack of methodology, materials, instructors, etc. Nevertheless, in 1942 a particular order of People's Commissariat of Health established that only those medics that underwent specialised training were admitted as forensic experts for court hearings.<sup>305</sup> It is, however, possible that in some cases, non-specialists were admitted as well.

At the end of 1943 – early 1944, regional experts started working, student training had resumed, and by 1945, laboratories came to life as well.<sup>306</sup> The first ones to be restored were the forensic medical service in Kharkiv, on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 1943 (Bokarius) and in Kyiv, on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1944 (Sapozhnikov).<sup>307</sup> The existence of two forensic medical services were revealed in Extraordinary Commission reports. It is logical to assume that these two centres organised informal groups of forensic medics that were conducting expert investigations for the Extraordinary Commission. It is essential to point out that their zones of operation were possibly determined by territorial division: Eastern Ukraine and Livoberezhia (territory of Ukraine on the left bank of the Dnipro River) "belonged" to Bokarius team, Naddniprianshchyna and right bank of the Dnipro to Sapozhnikov team. Additionally, some of the investigations on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR were conducted by specialists from the chief military forensic medic Avdeev's unit (the practice of military forensic medics will be described in the next section). The participation of military experts was described in the instructions for the Extraordinary Commission defining the process separately from non-military forensic experts: the paragraph stated that

"in zones of military conflict where administrative functions have not yet been restored, identification and investigation of crimes of German-fascist invaders and their allies are to be conducted by military personnel of the Red Army units".<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> *Prikaz NKZ SSSR No 431 o zaprete vracham imenovat'sia sudebno-meditsynskimi ekspertami (1942).*

<sup>306</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 125 *Transcript of talks, based on papers heard on the all-Republican meeting of regional medico-legal experts 30-31 January 1958.*

<sup>307</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 1, p. 17 *Medico-legal expertise in Ukrainian SSR and perspective of its development in 1949*; TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 3, p. 1 *Note regarding operating of the Main Medico-Legal expertise at the Ministry of Health, Ukrainian SSR.*

<sup>308</sup> TsDAVO f. 3538/ op. 1/ s. 3, p. 51 *Note regarding operating of the Main Medico-Legal expertise at the Ministry of Health, Ukrainian SSR.*

It may be that in exceptional cases (for instance, when there were many victims), there were forensic medics from Moscow involved. For example, in his letter to Khrushchev (the First Secretary of the Communists Party of Ukraine, de-facto Head of the Ukrainian SSR), Burdenko (member of the Extraordinary Commission (General) mentions that by particular assignment from Shvernik, Makarov and Professor Smirnov were sent to investigate mass murders in Vinnytsia and Bogdanivka in Odesa region.<sup>309</sup> That same letter states that these specialists were to report directly to the author (Burdenko). As of 1944, the Ukrainian SSR had 78 forensic medics, in 1945 – 108. It is possible that the restoration of equipment took longer, so the laboratories started working almost a year later.

#### 4.2.2. Soviet military forensic medicine service

As mentioned in the previous section, military forensic medics were also involved in war crimes investigations. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the system of military forensic medicine in the USSR. The Red Army did not have a division by republics, so there is no specific information about the military forensic service in the Ukrainian SSR. As illustrated in Fig. 4.3. military forensic medical experts were reporting to The People's Commissariat of Defence (Ministry of Defence). Additionally, the military forensic medical service had tasks that differed from civilian experts, structure, and resource and technical supply. However, as early as 1940-1941, common standards and legal acts were issued between The People's Commissariat of Defence and The People's Commissariat of Health, that established the mechanisms for interaction between military and civil medics in case of military actions.<sup>310</sup>

The 1930's were a period of active military growth in the USSR.<sup>311</sup> As early as 1934, a pathology conference in Moscow discussed organising pathology services in the Red Army.<sup>312</sup> A common

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<sup>309</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 735, p. 1 **A Letter from N. Burdenko to N. Khrushchov, 19 April 1944.**

<sup>310</sup> Budko, A., Gribovskaia, G., Zhuravliov, D. (2014) 'Istoricheskii opyt vzaimodeistviya voenno-meditsynskoi sluzhby s organami zdravookhraneniya strany v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941-1945 gg.', *Voyenno-meditsynskii zhurnal*, 335 (5), pp. 5-6.

<sup>311</sup> Whitewood, P., et al. (2015) *The Red Army and the Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Soviet Military*. University Press of Kansas.

<sup>312</sup> Chirskii, V., Sibiriov, S., Bushurov, S. (2012) 'K istorii sozdaniya Tsentral'noi patologoanatomicheskoi laboratorii Ministerstva oborony', *Voyenno – meditsynskii zhurnal*. Volume 333, no 12, p. 52.

practice during that time was to conduct forensic medical expertise for military prosecutors by employing civilian medical experts.<sup>313</sup> However, it was evident that

"organisation of common pathological and forensic medical expertise in the Red Army, due to the fact that a traumatic injury in peacetime from the legal and forensic medical standpoint had nothing in common with that during the battle and was not subject to court proceedings".<sup>314</sup>

In other words, military forensic experts were dealing with specific injuries, and their experts were working on cases that were quite different from civilian ones. For instance: analysis of the cause of death of those injured on the battlefield or in a hospital, errors or defects while evacuating injured from the battlefield, analysis and prevention of accidents in military units, as well as expert opinion in cases of suspected self-harm or self-inflicted wounds by soldiers and draftees.<sup>315</sup>

The first experience of using military pathologists (including forensic experts) in military conflict was the battle of Khalkhin – Gol River (Mongolia) in 1939 and the Winter War or the First Soviet-Finnish War in 1939-1940.<sup>316</sup> In spring 1941, a special instruction on conducting an autopsy of a corpse in battle conditions was developed and implemented.<sup>317</sup> Forensic medics were already staffed at medical battalions or division medical points in the first months of the Nazi-Soviet War. At the beginning of 1942, front-wide and army-wide pathoanatomical laboratories were already being formed.<sup>318</sup> These laboratories should have been staffed with three or four doctors, three laboratory technicians, and three nurses, although it was rarely complete in practice.<sup>319</sup> By early 1942, military experts examined 20,000 bodies of killed and deceased.<sup>320</sup> The authors of referred previous publication argued that these were most likely military personnel.

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<sup>313</sup> Pinchuk, P. and Fokin, A. (2015) 'Rabota sudebno-meditsynskoi sluzhby v gody voiny: sobytiya, facty, liudi', *Voyenno – meditsynskii zhurnal*. Volume 336, no 5, p. 64.

<sup>314</sup> Chirskii, V., Sibiriov, S., Bushurov, S. (2012) p. 53.

<sup>315</sup> Avdeev, M. (1943); Chirskii, V., Sibiriov, S., Bushurov, S. (2012) p. 52; Pinchuk, P., Fokin, A. (2015) p. 65 -67.

<sup>316</sup> Chirskii, V., Sibiriov, S., Bushurov, S. (2012) p.54.

<sup>317</sup> Chirskii, V., Sibiriov, S., Bushurov, S. (2012) p. 55.

<sup>318</sup> Pinchuk, P., Fokin, A. (2015) p.64.

<sup>319</sup> Chirskii, V., Sibiriov, S., Bushurov, S. (2012) pp. 55-56.

<sup>320</sup> Chirskii, V., Sibiriov, S., Bushurov, S. (2012) p. 56.

Forensic medical expert services were separated from the pathoanatomical one in March 1943.<sup>321</sup> Each Army and Front had to have a Diagnostic Forensic-Medical Division staffed with 10-20 people starting that same year.<sup>322</sup> The experience obtained during WWII became the foundation of the Rules of Conduct of Forensic-Medical Expertise at the Red Army in 1945.<sup>323</sup>

Previous sections clearly demonstrate that the USSR had a comprehensive and well-trained forensic medical expert service even before WWII. Further sections show in more detail the principles and methods of working of Soviet forensic experts that, had it existed at the time, could have been attributed to the forensic archaeology field.

#### 4.2.3. Principles and methods of forensic medical investigation

In order to understand the role of an expert in the Soviet Penal Process, a more detailed study of its specifics is needed. One of the essential functions of the Soviet legal system was, undoubtedly, the support of a totalitarian regime. This is a fact that needs to be kept in mind whilst carrying out any analysis. However, the function of experts was clearly stated in the legislation, and its value was recognised. According to Gorgone, the Soviet Criminal Procedure system was an inquisitorial one. The "prosecution does not bear the "burden of proof" as that concept is understood by Anglo-American jurisprudence".<sup>324</sup> It means that the results of all investigations, including forensic medical ones, bore the obligation of proof - in the sense of duty to facilitate the production of evidence".<sup>325</sup> De-facto, the principle of presumption of innocence (every person accused of a crime is innocent until proven guilty) began to be implemented in Soviet jurisprudence in the second half of the 1940s<sup>326</sup>, which suggested before that, it was not the prosecutor that was proving the guilt of the accused. Instead, it was the accused that had to prove their innocence.

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<sup>321</sup> *Directiva General'nogo Shtaba Krasnoi Armii No org /6/133213* (1943).

<sup>322</sup> Pinchuk, P. and Fokin, A. (2015) p.68.

<sup>323</sup> Pinchuk, P. and Fokin, A. (2015) p.70.

<sup>324</sup> Gorgone, J. (1980) 'Soviet Criminal Procedure Legislation: A Dissenting Perspective', *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 28(4), p. 583.

<sup>325</sup> Gorgone, J. (1980) p. 586.

<sup>326</sup> Fletcher, G. (1968) 'Two Kinds of Legal Rules: A Comparative Study of. Burden-of-Persuasion Practices in Criminal Cases', *The Yale Law Journal*, 77: 880, pp. 880-935.

Vyshynskii (the General Prosecutor of the USSR until 1939) argued that "an expert is not a judge, and he has no analogy to one in a legal sense",<sup>327</sup> which meant that an expert had to present the facts in a report but had no right to provide an opinion that would support either the prosecution or the defence. This role was reserved for the prosecutor, and often the decision – especially in political trials – was reached ahead of time.

Avdeev (the Head of the Forensic medicine service at the Red Army) noted that

"opinions on the cause of death based on collected evidence can and should be issued by the investigator, for whom an expertise of a corpse is a very valuable, sometimes most important, but yet just one of the pieces of evidence".<sup>328</sup>

However, the author noted that an expertise is a type of evidence, but an expert is not a witness: a witness needs to describe the facts, and an expert needs to interpret them. In other words, for an investigation, a witness is irreplaceable, but an expert was not.

Despite a long history of forensic-medical expertise in the USSR, forensic medics were not prepared for such a large amount of exhumation cases as resulted from Nazi persecution. Particularly, not in cases where hundreds and thousands of corpses had to be examined. In order to conduct such analysis, experts described in the section above were engaged, so were those that conducted an expert analysis of Nazi crime victims for the Extraordinary Commission.<sup>329</sup> However, the analysis of published research and various guidelines for forensic medics pre- and post-war allows us to quantify the development of Soviet forensic medicinal knowledge when the Extraordinary Commission was operating.

As illustrated in Table 4.1. experts had encountered death cases for reasons primarily prevalent in the Nazi crime victims, even in their pre-war practice. This proves that the specialists

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<sup>327</sup> Vyshynskii, A. (1941) *Teoriya sudebnykh dokazatel'stv v sovetskom prave*. Moscow: Yuridicheskoye izdatel'stvo NKYu SSSR, p. 190.

<sup>328</sup> Avdeev, M. (1950) *Sudebnaya meditsyna*. Handbook. Moscow: Gosyurizdat, p. 323.

<sup>329</sup> Bokarius, N. (1925); Popov, N. (ed.) (1938); Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940); Popov, N. (1946); Avdeev, M. (1950) *Sudebnaya meditsyna*. Handbook. Moscow: Gosyurizdat; Raiskii, M. (1953).

involved in the investigations had to be familiar with the principles of conducting such examinations and had instructions and tools to do them.

Aspects	Publications before the Nazi-Soviet War	Publications after WWII
Exhumation process	Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 34-35; 66-67.	Popov, N. (1946). p.42; Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 306-309.
Methods of causing injuries by gunshots	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 237- 303. Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 228-295. Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940). pp. 47-53.	Popov, N. (1946). pp.201-268. Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 88-144. Raiskii, M. (1953). pp. 136-180.
Methods of causing injuries by sharp objects	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 327-342. Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 214-228.	Popov, N. (1946). pp.151-154; 186-201; Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 80- 88. Raiskii, M. (1953). pp. 126-136.
Methods of causing injuries by blunt force	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 314-327. Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp.198-208.	Popov, N. (1946). pp. 155-186. Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 47- 60. Raiskii, M. (1953). pp. 92-118.
Process of dying due to asphyxia	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 162-223 (death by hanging), pp. 223-228 (death by strangulation by hand), 389-391 (death by being covered with filling substance, such as sand). Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 77-84; 85-98 (death by hanging), 98-99 (death by strangulation by hand). 107-108 (death by being covered with filling substance, such as sand).	Popov, N. (1946). pp. 68-75; 75-86 (death by hanging), 86-91 (death by strangulation by hand), 93-94 (death by being covered with filling substance, such as sand). Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 155-178, 183-184 (asphyxia due to inhaling poison or lack of air). Raiskii, M. (1953). pp. 202-210 (death by hanging), 212-213 (death by strangulation by hand).
Death from starvation	Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 138.	Popov, N. (1946). pp.128-129. Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 211-214.
Death from physical exhaustion	Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 138.	Popov, N. (1946). pp. 129-130. Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 215-216.
Establishing the time of death	Bokarius, N (1925). pp.118-143. Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 43-66. Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940). pp. 19-28.	Popov, N. (1946). pp.47-67; Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 279 – 293. Raiskii, M. (1953). pp. 37-57; 298.

Criminal toxicology (determining act of poisoning)	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 356-367. Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 313-432.	Popov, N. (1946). pp.292-383. Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 216-248. Raiskii, M. (1953). pp.247-292.
Identification of a person	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 421-432. Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 66-74, 495 – 508.	Gerasimov, M. (1949); Popov, N. (1946). pp. 455-459; Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 312- 314; Raiskii, M. (1953). pp. 230; 338-345.
Investigation of burnt remains	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 369 -373 (the author of this publication described cases where burning was a cause of death, but he also described changes in tissues caused by burns of various degrees and guided conducting surveys of such bodies), Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 31; 115- 122.	Popov, N. (1946). p.41; 111-115. Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 186-192. Raiskii, M. (1953). pp.224-231.
Visual examination of a dead body	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 10-16; 27-32. 48-58; Popov, N. (ed.) (1938). pp. 22-23, 25-26, Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940). pp. 64-84; 92-106.	Popov, N. (1946). p. 32, Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 295-299, Raiskii, M. (1953). pp.297- 309.
Photography	Bokarius, N (1925). pp.102-114. Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940). pp.62-63.	Raiskii, M. (1953). p. 298.
Drawing or plan of the crime scene	Bokarius, N (1925). pp.39; 46-47.	Raiskii, M. (1953). p. 298.
Collecting physical evidence	Bokarius, N (1925). pp. 16-19, 32- 47, 59-101. Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940). pp. 29-44, 54-62, 76-91.	Popov, N. (1946). p.39., Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 461-464, Raiskii, M. (1953). pp. 299; 427-442.

*Table. 4.1. A brief historiography of essential aspects of medico-legal aspects in the 1930s-1950s.*

As a potential for future studies, the author foresees the task of more detailed analysis of aspects shown in the table above, and of tracing of implementation of theoretical knowledge in practice during the work of the Extraordinary Commission. One example of analysis of



theory and practice of conducting exhumations as part of Nazi crime investigation, will be provided later in this chapter.

### 4.3. History of the Creation of the Extraordinary Commission

The Extraordinary Commission (General)<sup>330</sup> was established by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1942 and aimed to document evidence of Nazi atrocities across all occupied Soviet territory. The language of the establishing decree outlined the main aim of the Commission<sup>331</sup>: to provide a complete account of crimes committed by Nazis and their allies, regarding engaging a *criminal* and *material claims* trial proceedings.<sup>332</sup> Both of the stated purposes and the methods of achieving them focused on the effort by the USSR primarily on recording material damage, including establishing the amount of potential (meaning desired) compensation. These declarations were even more dubious considering that the Soviet Union did not recognise private property rights, so all of the compensation received would end up in the state coffers.<sup>333</sup> In 1942, when the Commission was created, the amount of compensation was to be determined based on documented evidence. Most likely, the evidence was envisioned as coming from factory officials who would assess the damages when feasible and send their reports to the Extraordinary Commission. It should be considered

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<sup>330</sup> Here and later this Commission named The Extraordinal Commission (General) in purpose to avoid confusion between different Commissions.

<sup>331</sup> *Ukaz Prezidiuma VS SSSR ob obrazovanii Chrezvychainoi komissii po ustanovleniu I rassledovaniyu zlodeyanii nemetsko-fashystskikh zakhvatchikov I ikh soobschnikov i prichenennogo imi uscherba grazhdanam, kolkhozam, obschestvennym organizatsiyam, gosudarstvennym predpriyatiyam I uchrezhdeniyam SSSR (1942)*. Available at: <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/163266-iz-ukaza-prezidiuma-verhovnogo-soveta-sssr-ot-2-noyabrya-1942-goda-ob-obrazovanii-chrezvychaynoy-gosudarstvennoy-komissii-po-ustanovleniyu-i-rassledovaniyu-zlodeyaniy-nemetsko-fashistskih-zahvatchikov-i-ih-soobschnikov-i-prichinennogo-imi-uscherba-grazhdanam-kol> (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

<sup>332</sup> Feferman, K. (2009). p 33.

<sup>333</sup> NB: According to Soviet legislation, understanding of 'property' was different than in the Western country. The owner of all properties was the State (officially Soviet people). The individual was able to have the only *personal property*, such as: personal belongs, savings, small household. That meant some necessary goods for every-day lives. The Soviet ideology based on fair distribution all benefits within community. However, this regulation provided a reason interpreted private property as a sing of 'the class enemy,' i.e., the private property owner marked as 'exploiter' and could be convicted for participating in counter-revolutionary movement or terrorism. For more details see: Kucherov, S. (1962) 'Property in the Soviet Unio', *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, pp. 376-392; Kimura, H. (1970) 'Personal Property in the Soviet Union, with Particular Emphasis on the Khrushchev Era: An Ideological, Political and Economic Dilemma', *スラブ研究(II)*, 14, pp. 63-119; Lynne, V. (2008) *The war against the peasantry, 1927–1930: the tragedy of the Soviet countryside*. Yale University Press, pp. 205-263; Fitzpatrick, Sh. (2008) pp. 58-64.

that the investigation of the fate of missing people was not a subsidiary action for the Commission action. Occasionally Commission reports included a list of murdered people of forced labour workers, but it happened accidentally. Many families had known about their relative's destiny after Ukrainian Independence through the Red Cross search service.

The Commission was comprised of the officials described in Table 4.2.

Nikolai Shvernik (the Chairman)	Soviet politician
Academic Nikolai Burdenko	Soviet surgeon
Academic Boris Vedeneev	Soviet scientist, a specialist in electricity-producing
Valentina Grizodubova	first Soviet female pilot
Andrei Zhdanov	Soviet politician and ideologist
Metropolitan Nicholas (Yarushevich)	bishop of Russian Orthodox Church
Academic Trofim Lysenko	Soviet agronomist and biologist, now known as a pseudoscientist
Academic Yevgeny Tarle	Soviet historian
Aleksey Tolstoy	Soviet writer
Academic Ilia Traynin <sup>334</sup>	Soviet lawyer

*Table 4.2. Members of The Extraordinary Commission (General).*

The range of professionals included in the General Commission clearly demonstrated that the primary purpose was propaganda. That was a reason a well-known involved person such as Grizodubova, Tolstoy, Metropolitan Nicolas, Zhdanov were involved in the Extraordinary Commissions activity. Burdenko was the Red Army Chief surgeon. However, even he was involved in the most recognisable investigations such as, in Katyn, Orel (on Plate 4.2.) and Maly Trostianets.

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<sup>334</sup> NB: Some confusion exists with Ilia Traynin membership in The Extraordinary Commission (General). This confuse becomes from another well-known Soviet lawyer who had the same surname, Aron Traynin. He was involved in some Commission investigation, was a member of the Soviet Delegation for Nurnberg Trials and took part in the Soviet Anti-Fascist Committee. However, he was affected in different stages of Nazi crime investigation and judgment, but it is incorrect to mention him as a member of the main body of the Extraordinary Commission as it happened, for example: Cadiot, J. and Penter T. (2013) p. 163.

According to Sorokina, the fact that Soviet academics were included in the Extraordinary Commission and its entire work (besides practical tasks) was an important propaganda step. The "Stalinist plan to create the phantom of a "public prosecutor" of fascism was a success".<sup>335</sup>



*Plate 4.2. Burdenko (on the left) during the Extraordinary Commission investigation in OreI336*

It is essential to point out that November 1942, when the Commission was established, was right in the middle of one of the critical battles during the Nazi-Soviet War – the Stalingrad battle (now Volgograd), which took place from the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1942 until the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1943.<sup>337</sup> The occupation of the USSR was at its peak at that time. It is reasonable to assume that the creation of this Commission was meant to strengthen the spirit of soldiers and to convey the belief in the victory of the Red Army because: (1) there was evidence being collected to report crimes and claim compensation, that instils confidence in a further court trial for Nazi criminals (because the prosecution was only possible upon total liberation of the Soviet territory and

<sup>335</sup> Sorokina, M. (2005) p.803.

<sup>336</sup> RGAKFD, № 0-316390

<sup>337</sup> Feferman, K. (2009) p. 29.

accomplishing victory); (2) the results of their investigations were frequently published in newspapers with photographs and witness testimonies.<sup>338</sup> That was the same practice as mentioned above in this chapter, about using crime investigation reports for propaganda purposes in occupation-time press. Therefore, the actions of Commissions had a crucial propaganda role: on the one hand, it instilled the belief in victory. In contrast, it created a drive for revenge since many soldiers and officers had friends and relatives in occupied territories.

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338e.g., Burdenko, N. (1944) *Soobscheniye Spetsial'noi Komissii po ustanovleniyu i rassledovaniyu obstoyatel'stv rasstrelya nemetsko-fashystskimi zahvatchikami v Katynskom lesu pol'skih oficerov*. Available at: <https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/%D0%A1%D0%BE%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%A1%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B9%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B8%D0%91%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%BE> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022) p. 590; *Soobscheniye Chrezvychainoi Gossudarstvennoi Komissii o razrushenii gor. Smolenska* (1943) Available at: <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/177905-soobschenie-chrezvychaynoy-gosudarstvennoy-komissii-o-razrushenii-goroda-smolenska-i-zlodzeyaniyah-sovershennyh-nemetsko-fashistskimi-zahvatchikami-nad-sovetskimi-grazhdanami-6-noyabrya-1943-g> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022); *Soobscheniye Chrezvychainoi Gossudarstvennoi Komissii o razrusheniyah I zverstvah, sovershennyh nemetsko-fashystskimi zahvatchikami v gorode Kieve* (1944) Available at: <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/253368-soobschenie-chrezvychaynoy-gosudarstvennoy-komissii-o-razrusheniyah-i-zverstvah-sovershennyh-nemetsko-fashistskimi-zahvatchikami-v-g-kieve-29-fevralya-1944-g> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).



*Fig. 4.4. The Extraordinary Commission (General) aims.*

Out of six aims stated by the founding of the Decree of the Commission (mentioned in Fig. 4.4), only the first one mentions accounting for acts of violence and deaths of the civil population, including as a result of forced labour. The main aim of the Extraordinary Commission was to ensure that the USSR received material compensation for damages inflicted during the occupation of its territories. However, this was not their only task. For instance, Cadiot and Penter point out the following aims for the creation of the Extraordinary Commission: to show that the prosecution of war criminals was a priority for the Soviet government concerning, to demonstrate loyalty and support for its allies; intent to avoid international investigations, but at the same time to create sufficient proof base regarding Nazi crimes, and to avoid responsibility for crimes committed on the territories annexed by the Soviet Union as a result

of The *Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact*.<sup>339</sup> Even though these aims are unquestionable, the economic aspect was the dominant one, as stated in materials of the Commission.<sup>340</sup>

No specific designations mention either ethnicity or religious background (e.g., Jewish and Roma people) or any other categorisations (for instance, mental disability). Any crimes committed against PoWs were excluded from the Commission's scope as per Decree. Essentially, the process of documenting the evidence of crimes only began once most Soviet territory was liberated and the extent of these crimes and their brutality was revealed. Hence, Soviet propaganda actively exploited the image of an unyielding Soviet Human that continued to fight even when imprisoned.

#### 4.4. The Ukrainian Republican Extraordinary Commission

Considering that the subject of this research is Holocaust studies in Ukraine, it is important to discuss how the Extraordinary Commission was operating in the territory of the Ukrainian SSR. The process of creation of the Republican and Regional Commissions (Hirsch proposed to use term *subcommissions*<sup>341</sup>) was initiated by the Regulation of the Council of People's Commissars of USSR dated the 16<sup>th</sup> March 1943 and set aims for Commissions' investigation.<sup>342</sup>

According to this Regulation, there were 25 Republican, 4 Territorial and 76 Regional Commissions.<sup>343</sup> The Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission was created on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1943. It seems fair to use this date of creation as per the document packet signed by the Ukrainian

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<sup>339</sup> Cadiot, J and Pentec, T. (2013) p. 163.

<sup>340</sup> See description of fond Extraordinary commission in GARF; in TsDAVO; Moine, N. (2013). p. 180; Cadiot, J and Pentec, T. (2013) p.164.

<sup>341</sup> Hirsch, F. (2008) p. 26.

<sup>342</sup> *Postanovleniye SNK SSSR 299 o rabote Chrezvychainoi Gosudarstvennoi Komissii po ustanovleniyu i rassledovaniyu zlodeyanii nemetsko-fashystskih zahvatchikov* (1943). Available at: <https://victims.rusarchives.ru/postanovlenie-snk-sssr-no-299-o-rabote-chrezvychaynoy-gosudarstvennoy-komissii-po-ustanovleniyu-i> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>343</sup> Butenko, Ye. (2016) p. 26.

Council of People's Commissars on that date. Regulation №130 was established with people that would form this Commission.<sup>344</sup> Its members are mentioned in Table 4.3. below:

Petro Rudnitskii	The State Planning Commission at the Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars.
A. Voskoboinik	The Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars.
Hrygorii Pinchuk	The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine.
Luka Palamarchuk	The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine.
V. Vovk	The Ukrainian SSR Public Prosecutor's Office.
P. Symonenko	The Ukrainian SSR Public Prosecutor's Office.
Ya. Navolnieva	The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Ukrainian SSR.
Guzenko	Deputy Chief of the State Office of Archives at the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of USSR.

*Table 4.3. Members of The Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission.*

On that same date, a meeting of the Ukrainian Political Bureau was held that discussed the same topic, as per the excerpt from Minutes № 30.<sup>345</sup> However, their version of the Commission's staffing table excludes Guzenko (possibly due to the bulk of the documentation, would be transferred to Moscow rather than kept in local archives, a hypothesis that requires a more detailed analysis).<sup>346</sup> These facts illustrate that, although the Republic's government did the staffing of the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission, the final decision was left to the Communist Party.

<sup>344</sup> TsDAVO f. 2/op. 7/ s. 583, p. 110 Decree of Council of People Commissars regarding including Rudnytski, Voskobiinyk, Pinchuk, Palamarchuk, Vovk, Symonenko, Navolnev in work of the Republican Commission for recording and investigation of German-Fascists invaders crimes.

<sup>345</sup> TsDAVO/f 3538/op 1/ s. 1, p. 1 Extract from the minutes of the Political Bureau of Central Committee of Communist Party of Ukraine meeting regarding including Rudnytski, Voskobiinyk, Pinchuk, Palamarchuk, Vovk, Symonenko, Navolnev in work of the Republican Commission for recording and investigation of German-Fascists invaders crimes..

<sup>346</sup> NB: It was a common practice to transfer the main documents to Moscow as the capital of the Soviet Union and a part of the Soviet policy of centralisation.

Both documents were signed by the Chairman of the Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars, Korniets. It is logical to assume that the discussion took place at the meeting of The Political Bureau (and accounting for traditions of the USSR, the decision was previously made in Moscow). The Council of People's Commissars, being the executive and directorial branch of the government, has ratified this decision. The final decision was made at The Council of People's Commissars of the USSR. On the 16<sup>th</sup> March 1944, Korniets sent a letter to the Chairman of the General Extraordinary Commission Shvernik. This pointed out that the State Staffing Commission had not approved the staffing table of 15 members of the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission at the Council of People's Commissars, which prevented the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission's members from performing their tasks.

The leading working teams represented the Regional Extraordinary Commissions that were surveying the actual sites where crimes took place. Their task was to organise investigations in local towns and villages.<sup>347</sup> The quality of reports directly depended on the level of a regional organisation's ability as well. For instance: the Kyiv Regional Extraordinary Commission began working in November 1943, after the city was liberated from the Nazis. It had nine District Extraordinary Commissions in the city itself and 57 Regional ones under its command. 47 of those only started working in April 1944 after the liberation of the whole region. Overall, there were 97,221 members involved in the work of the Kyiv Regional Extraordinary Commission.<sup>348</sup> There were 2,582 reports filed.<sup>349</sup> However, most reports described material damage: only 684 Acts were written on crimes against people (including the extermination of Jews and people with mental health conditions, crimes against PoW's, etc.). As of the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1944, the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission filed 9,146 Acts describing crimes of Nazis and their allies in the Ukrainian SSR, which observed that 1,574,129 peaceful citizens (no specific nationalities

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<sup>347</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 3, p. 11 [Note regarding operating of the Main Medico-Legal expertise at the Ministry of Health, Ukrainian SSR.](#)

<sup>348</sup> TsDAGO/f 166/ op 3/ s 216 pp. 1-2 [Organisation of work of Regional and City Commission for supporting Extraordinary State Commission work.](#)

<sup>349</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 216, pp. 3-4 [Organisation of work of Regional and City Commission for supporting Extraordinary State Commission work.](#)



or ethnicity of victims mentioned) and 818,762 PoW's were killed whilst 1,277,921 people had been deported for forced labour.<sup>350</sup>

Upon comparison of the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission with the General Extraordinary Commission, it is evident that the Ukrainian one had no subject-matter experts, such as economists, lawyers or doctors, and was only comprised of executive officials. The probable explanation is that the main task of the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission was to oversee the work of Extraordinary local commissions and to create documents on crimes and damages for practical uses<sup>351</sup>. However, it appears that the General Extraordinary Commission provided the direction. The first set of actions was conducted in the easternmost regions of Ukraine: Voroshylovgrad (Lugansk) and Kharkiv, as these towns were the first major cities liberated in the territory of the Ukrainian SSR. The main task of members of the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission was to distribute the guidelines from the Extraordinary Commission (General) and to explain them to the local population of those regions<sup>352</sup>. It appears that, in the beginning, the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission was reporting on their findings directly to Korniets (the Chairman of the Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars). Here is an example of a letter written to him by Rudnitskii (approximately July 1943, exact date unknown):

"About ten days ago, I instructed Captain Veselov to forward you the letter containing a short overview of work conducted by our team to account for crimes and damages inflicted by German-fascist invaders. However, based on instructions you gave to Karavaev on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, you were not informed of my letter..."<sup>353</sup>

This letter proved that the coordination of the first investigations was almost done in real time. Furthermore, early reports were being sent to a higher leadership instead of being accumulated in regions, that happened later. The methodology for evidence collected, was being developed in the field as investigations were happening. Even though Extraordinary Commissions had some experience working in the Russian SFSR, they were mainly working in

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<sup>350</sup> TsDAVO f. 2/ op. 7/ s. 781, p. 50 **Note regarding atrocities of German-Fascist crimes based on materials come from Extraordinary state Commission for Ukrainian SSR on 25th October 1944.**

<sup>351</sup> TsDAVO f. 2/ op. 7/ s. 904, p. 18 **A Letter from L. Korniets to N.Shvernik.**

<sup>352</sup> TsDAVO f. 2/ op. 7/ s. 781, p. 55. **A Letter from illegible to L. Korniets.**

<sup>353</sup> TsDAVO f. 2/ op. 7/ s.781, p. 55. **A Letter from illegible to L. Korniets.**

the areas which had been occupied for the shortest amount of time compared to other regions. The Extraordinary Commission what is now Ukraine and Belarus, had numerous cases requiring investigation, compared to the territory of Soviet Russia under occupation, for instance: (1), the entire territory in present Ukraine was under occupation (Kharkiv from 24<sup>th</sup> October 1941 till 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1943, Donetsk (Stalino) from 21<sup>st</sup> October 1941 till 7<sup>th</sup> October 1943.), (2) as stated earlier in Chapter 1, the territory of Ukrainian SSR had a vast number of Jewish settlements (shtetls) where it may be likely that the death toll could be higher.

#### 4.4.1. Experts and procedures of Regional, District and Town Extraordinary Commissions

Initially, local Commissions did not necessarily include a medical professional (not to mention a forensic expert). Forensic medical examinations were only conducted in exceptional cases.<sup>354</sup> At the same time, there were several working groups created to collect information about specific kinds of acts of violence. On the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1943, a particular working group was created by The Office of State Archives at The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>355</sup> It is probable that the task of that group was to collect trophy documents (perhaps the purposes of collecting these documents varied as well), firstly as proof of Nazi crimes and, therefore, as the foundation for getting compensation. Additionally, these documents were used to inspect individuals' behaviours during the occupation, for instance, as potential collaborators with the Nazis. As per Khorkhordina, integration of Soviet archives into the system of the Internal Affairs Office took place in 1934-1938 as one of the symptoms of a totalitarian regime that required absolute control over document circulation.<sup>356</sup> Therefore, it is plausible that the collection and processing of these documents was a task for professional archive workers and people who were members of the investigations office, those of the totalitarian state, that was the USSR.

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<sup>354</sup> TsDAGO f. 1 / op 70 / s. 22, p. 38 [Regarding atrocities of German authorities in occupied districts of Ukraine 1941-1942.](#)

<sup>355</sup> TsDAVO f. 3538/op. 1/ s. 1, p. 3 [Decree of Council of People Commissars regarding submission of the working group at Directorate of State Archives of NKVD Ukrainian SSR for collection and analysis of materials regarding recording and investigation crimes committed by German-Fascists invaders.](#)

<sup>356</sup> Khorkhordina, T. (2009 'Khraniteli sekretnykh dokumentov', in T. Kondrat'eva, *Rezhymnye liudi v SSSR*. Moscow: ROSPEN, pp. 72-73.

It was the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs that put together a Memorandum to be approved by the Council of People's Commissars of Ukrainian SSR on actions required to create a document base on the history of Ukraine, the Great Patriotic War, and to streamline the archival order of Ukrainian SSR.<sup>357</sup> There were several regional memorandums created that regulated for local level on how to collect evidence of war crimes. For instance, on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1944, the Mykolaiv region issued a Decree by the Executive Committee of the Regional Council "on the collection and storage of documented evidence related to Patriotic War of Soviet People against German occupants".<sup>358</sup> All regional institutions had to participate in collecting these documents and sending them to the Scientific-Historical Archive (now most likely the State archive of Mykolaiv region).

The local population was also involved, by publishing an ad in a local newspaper, stating that applications from regular citizens to participate in the work of the Commission were being accepted.<sup>359</sup> There were other methods of engagement too, for example: in the Vinnytsia region, there were announcements published on behalf of the District Commissariat Bureau (the regional Communist party Committee), stating that the Regional Extraordinary Commission was created on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1944<sup>360</sup>. One of the Regional Extraordinary Commission members was Professor Kononenko from the Medical institute (now- Mykola Pyrogov Vinnytsia National Medical University). Still, it is not possible to determine his speciality. The structure of Soviet criminal medicine will be described later in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there was not always a possibility of involving forensic medical experts in these investigations.

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<sup>357</sup> TsDAVO f. 2 / op 70 / s. 1517, p. 5. [Note regarding providing facilities for state archives in Kyiv and Kharkiv.](#)

<sup>358</sup> TsDAVO f. 2 / op 70 / s. 1517, p. 3. [Decree of Executive Committee of regional Committee of Labour Members regarding collecting and keeping documental materials of Patriotic War of Soviet People against German invaders.](#)

<sup>359</sup> TsDAGO f. 1 /op. 70/ s. 22, p. 41 [Regarding atrocities of German authorities in occupied districts of Ukraine 1941-1942.](#)

<sup>360</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/op.23/ s. 1062, p. 121 [Decree of Bureau of Vinnytsia Regional Committee of Communist Party Of Ukraine regarding creating of Commission for estimation of damage of people's property, crimes by German-Fascist invaders on the territory of Vinnytsia region.](#)

#### 4.4.2. Acts (Commission reports)

Regional Commissions were tasked with putting Acts (Deed) together based on conducted investigations and these provided proof for compensation claims. There were practical guidelines sent to each regional Commission instructing them of a process to establish and investigate the crimes of *German-Fascist Invaders* (Soviet definition).<sup>361</sup> Regional Extraordinary Commissions also received template forms and guidelines for different types of reports.<sup>362</sup> Some Acts were put together based on the testimonies of victims and witnesses as they were conducted.<sup>363</sup> When confirmed that a crime had taken place, they made effort to find the culprits - organisers, enablers, executors and assistants (and to detail their names), army unit numbers and organisations. Reports had to contain descriptions of the crime, including time, place and criminal activity<sup>364</sup>. If there was a witness or victim interviewed, it was mandatory to state their first and last name and contact details.<sup>365</sup> Reports were signed by all parties that participated in their creation.<sup>366</sup> These acts formed the basis of the Extraordinary Commission reports and sought to cover the following research questions<sup>367</sup>:

- Determine the number of buried.
- Determine cause of death.
- Determine the age of burial.
- Determine traumas caused to victims before death.

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<sup>361</sup> TsDAVO f. 3538/ op. 1/ s. 3 ,p. 5 [Guidance regarding the order of estimating and investigating crimes \[committed by\] German-Fascist invaders and their accomplices.](#)

<sup>362</sup> TsDAVO f. 3538/ op. 1/ s. 3, pp. 5-10 [Guidance regarding the order of estimating and investigating crimes \[committed by\] German-Fascist invaders and their accomplices.](#)

<sup>363</sup> TsDAGO f. 1 / op 70 / s. 22, p. 40 [Regarding atrocities of German authorities in occupied districts of Ukraine 1941-1942](#) ; TsDAGO/f 1/ op 23/ s 1062 pp. 41-48 [Various acts from Kyiv region.](#)

<sup>364</sup> TsDAGO f. 1 / op 70 / s. 22, p. 40 [Regarding atrocities of German authorities in occupied districts of Ukraine 1941-1942.](#)

<sup>365</sup> TsDAVO f. 3538/ op. 1/ s. 3, p. 5 [Guidance regarding the order of estimating and investigating crimes \[committed by\] German-Fascist invaders and their accomplices.](#)

<sup>366</sup> TsDAGO f. 1 / op 70 / s. 22, p. 40 [Regarding atrocities of German authorities in occupied districts of Ukraine 1941-1942.](#)

<sup>367</sup> TsDAVO f. 4620/ op. 3/ s. 316, p. 13. [Act of medico-legal expertise from Kherson, 23d March 1944.](#)

Most likely, the structure of the Act had to follow the rules of criminalistics of that time, and therefore consist of an Introduction, Description and Conclusion, where an expert would summarise the results of investigations as answers to the set goals (see above).<sup>368</sup>

All supporting documents were attached to Acts: petitions from citizens, reports from medical experts, photographs, letters from prison or, labour camp orders of occupation officials, etc.<sup>369</sup> In some cases, professional photographers were involved in documenting the crime. For instance: Stronko received a special permit from the Council of People's Commissars that allowed him to photograph evidence of crimes, and to collect photographs of destruction and atrocities on the territory of Ukraine.<sup>370</sup> It should be noted that this permit was necessary for several reasons: since the photographing was to take place either in battleground zones or, in their immediate vicinities, the pass protected the photographer from being treated as a spy. Since the USSR was a totalitarian state, a photographer had to undergo extensive background screening before the permit was issued, to ensure that he did not photograph something prohibited. This situation offers a likely explanation as to why there were few photographs attached to Acts.

There were some rare cases where the liberating army conducted preliminary inspections rather than Extraordinary Commission members. For example, on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1944, a Memorandum from the Political Office of The First Ukrainian Front was sent to Khrushchev regarding evidence of war crimes in Slavuta. This location had been liberated on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1944.<sup>371</sup> A report created on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1944 described the discovery of over 100,000 graves (SIC! not individuals<sup>372</sup>) and approximately 600 live prisoners at the PoW camp located here<sup>373</sup>. A former member of the Slavuta Extraordinary Commission that was in the city during the operations of a military commission mentioned in her interview that the first

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<sup>368</sup> Vyshynskii, A. (ed.) (1935) *Kriminalistika*. Handbook. OGIZ: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo "Sovetskoye zakonodatel'stvo". Volume 1, p.221.

<sup>369</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op 70/ s. 22, pp. 40-41 [Regarding atrocities of German authorities in occupied districts of Ukraine 1941-1942](#).

<sup>370</sup> TsDAVO f, 3538/ op. 1/ s. 5, p. 1 [ID of Mikhail Stronko](#).

<sup>371</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 1062, p. 165 [Report of General-Major Shatilov to General Lieutenant Khrushchev regarding crimes in Slavuta, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1944](#).

<sup>372</sup> NB: It could be misprinting.

<sup>373</sup> TsDAVO f.1/ op. 23/ s. 1062, p. 166 [Act from Slavuta, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1944](#).

surveys were done while shots were still being fired.<sup>374</sup> Comparisons with later reports show that the number of graves recorded in these reports was vastly exaggerated in this particular document mentioned above. As discussed in relevant chapters, the number of burial sites was reduced in other documents produced by the Extraordinary Commission.

#### **4.5. Uncovering of mass graves: theory and practice**

This section analyses the practice of the Extraordinary Commission that can be associated with forensic archaeology in its modern sense – the uncovering of graves. There are quite a few steps here: determining the grave's location, recording of a grave's location, grave uncovering, body exhumation, visual body examination, autopsy, physical evidence collection, the reburial of corpses and identification of victims.

Some of these methods should be covered in more detail, since understanding the procedures and key aspects which were employed by the Extraordinary Commission members could play an important role in the forensic archaeological interpretation of gathered evidence.

##### 4.5.1. Exhumation

Soviet forensic experts understood exhumation in the same way as modern practitioners and scholars (a legal extraction of a buried corpse from the ground), based on a court or law enforcement agent's order during an investigation.<sup>375</sup> Exhumation could be either part of the initial or secondary analysis. During exhumation, besides an investigator, there had to be a forensic medic and *poniatyie* (attesting witnesses).<sup>376</sup> The number of the latter was not specified in the handbooks referred to above, but since they are listed in plural tense, there had to be at least two. There is no indication in these documents about who could be a witness and who could not. Vyshynskii stated that there should be no strangers at the crime scene besides witnesses or those that could provide some explanations about the crime. The

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<sup>374</sup> YIUA, 889 U.

<sup>375</sup> Popov, N. (ed.), (1938).p. 42.

<sup>376</sup> Popov, N. (ed.), (1938) pp.34.

investigator had to make sure that those present were not communicating or exchanging information with each other.<sup>377</sup>

At the end of the procedure, all personnel had to sign the protocol of exhumation. It is explicitly stated that, if a forensic medic was not available, the exhumation had to be conducted by an investigator. This stipulation is questionable, since the primary examination in situ provides essential information about the condition of the corpse that only a specialist would recognise (e.g., sometimes a few minutes of contact with fresh air can change a corpse quite significantly). During the work of the Extraordinary Commissions, there were medics from local hospitals engaged in cases when forensic experts were not available. For instance, in Slavuta, one of the mass graves was surveyed with oversight from an otolaryngologist (an ear, nose and throat specialist) from the local hospital who was possibly the daughter of the principal Medical Doctor.<sup>378</sup>

#### 4.5.2. Mass grave location: recording

When an exhumation took place, Exhumations Minutes had to be created. These had to include:

- A description of a burial site and notable markers (e.g., memorials, crosses, inscriptions, etc; anything that would help find the burial site later on).
- Type of ground.
- Depth of burial.
- Casket description including its contents (e.g., anything that could describe the conditions in which the body was held to aid later analysis of the post-mortem interval, signs of decomposition, evidence of anti-, peri- and post-mortem damage).

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<sup>377</sup> Vyshynskii, A. (ed.) (1935). p. 170.

<sup>378</sup> YIUA, 889 U.

- Details of any changes or damage found on the body while in the morgue that was not described when the corpse was found (e.g., that which may have occurred during extraction or during transportation).<sup>379</sup>

An important aspect was the creation of a map of the site following the requirements of the topographic survey. This would be produced "by eye", meaning, without the use of special equipment. The map had to include details about:

- Roads, walkways, buildings, fences, ditches – basically anything that could form lines on the plan.
- Angle of the observation of objects, e.g., angle of street observation.
- Free-standing objects, e.g., large stones, trees or anything that could be used as a marker.

It was also mandatory to show the geographical orientation in the form of a north-south line.

<sup>380</sup>

Examples of different types of mass grave location recordings are shown in Fig 4.5. Fig.4.5 (A) shows the topographic orientation of the location, using the road and the forest as reference points. Fig.4.5. (B) can be considered the most comprehensive and accurate from methodology for surveying crime scenes in the 1940s. It shows the orientation of the plan (north direction), the forest and the road, with distances to burial locations in metres. Fig 4.5. (C) shows a burial location on a scale of the town of Brailov.

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<sup>379</sup> Avdeev, M. (1976) *Sudebno-meditsynskaya ekspertiza trupa*. Moscow: Meditsyna, p. 19.

<sup>380</sup> Avdeev, M. (1950) pp. 295-299.



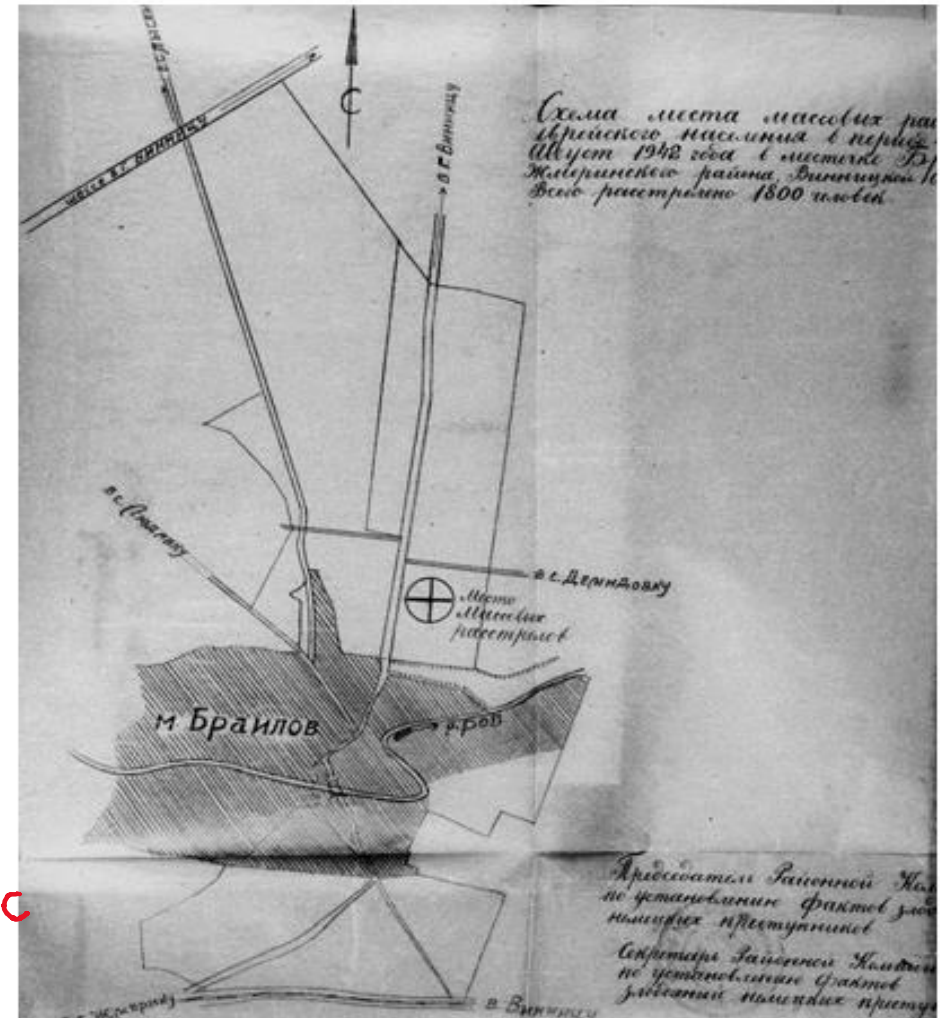


Fig. 4.5. Some examples of mass grave location mapping:

A) Plan of mass grave location in Pavlivka, Chernigiv region. USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 3: f. 7021/ op.78 / s. 31; B) Plan of mass grave location in Sokal. Lviv region. TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s 1063, p 143; C) Plan of mass grave location in Brailov Vinnytsia region. USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 4: f. 7021/ op. 54 / s. 1268

The following tools were used for map creation: a notepad holder to which paper was attached, a pencil, a "visor" three-grade ruler, and a compass.<sup>381</sup> The distances between objects were usually given in steps (as opposed to centimetres or metres), whereby three steps equalled two metres.<sup>382</sup>

#### 4.5.2. The procedure of mass grave excavation

The medico-legal investigation of the mass grave itself could have taken place at various intervals after the burial – from several days to several months (or, in the case of the Extraordinary Commission, sometimes several years). It was said explicitly by Avdeev that the longevity of exhumation does not preclude criminal investigation:

"some crucial information for investigation purposes can be obtained even when the process of decay of a corpse has advanced quite significantly, for instance, in cases where there was gunshot (SIC!), in poisoning by certain substances that are not subject to decay and a few other cases".<sup>383</sup>

The organisation of the exhumation had to be initiated by investigative officials (in this context, it is likely to mean "members of Extraordinary Commissions"), and the exhumation itself was conducted under their supervision. The person in charge of disinterment had the following tasks: logistical support (most likely that meant arranging for diggers or some equipment to dig out a corpse) and composing transport, and report documentation (Acts). Since there was no concept of forensic archaeology in the USSR, like in other countries in the 1940s, it was a standard practice to engage local workers. (Plate 4.3.) The involvement of the local community in earth digging was common in the USSR, even in regular archaeological fieldwork in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The procedure of the corpse's extraction from the burial was not regulated in guides or handbooks for forensic experts. Most likely, local workers lifted bodies for examination in the most convenient way for them, e.g., using ropes, hooks or stretchers.

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<sup>381</sup> Vyshynskii, A. (ed.) (1935) p. 186.

<sup>382</sup> Vyshynskii, A. (ed.) (1935) p. 187.

<sup>383</sup> Avdeev, M. (1950) p. 306.

As cadavers were usually in a state of advanced decomposition, they often suffered from additional injuries. Therefore, valuable information regarding the cause and manner of death, possible Post-Mortem Interval etc, would have been lost.



*Plate 4.3. Examples of a mass grave excavation: left – the excavation of a mass grave in a former anti-tank ditch in Sokal, Lviv region.; right - Excavation of mass grave in Brailov, Vinnytsia region.<sup>384</sup>*

<sup>384</sup> TsDAGO f. 1, op 23, s 1063; USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 4: f. 7021/ op. 54 / s. 1268

### 4.5.3. Victim identification

Identification of a victim was crucial for experts. The techniques developed and used in the 1940s still play an essential role in the identification of individuals today; even following the development of DNA methods.<sup>385</sup> These include: visual identification, the examination of clothing, verbal descriptions of the body and dental comparison.<sup>386</sup> Soviet forensics in the 1940s-1950s also concentrated on the anthropological analysis of remains<sup>387</sup>, and a very advanced method for that time, dactyloscopy (fingerprint analysis).<sup>388</sup> According to Avdeev, during the autopsy, any birthmarks of the unusual form (including their location), or specifics of physical development, injuries, scars, and tattoos had to be noted. All of these had to be pointed out in Autopsy Minutes. The dental inspection had to be done thoroughly: teeth type, types and form of crowns and absence of any number of teeth all had to be recorded (it should be noted that in the 1940s, dentists used metal-based crowns: steel, gold, so dental crowns were often a distinctive feature). The author also states that personal belongings played a significant role in the identification of a corpse, e.g., clothes that were "easy to identify", personal items and documents.<sup>389</sup> The most common practice for victim identification was the viewing of corpses by relatives and friends. However, Plate 4.4. presents the most common practice for victim identification – demonstration of remains to friends and relatives.

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<sup>385</sup> For more information: Iwamura, E., Guimaraes, M., Evison, M. (2016) 'DNA Methods to Identify Missing Persons', *In*S. Morewitz and C. Sturdy Colls *Handbook of Missing Persons*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 337 – 352; King, M.-C, Harvey, M. The Use of DNA in the Identification of Postmortem Remains. *In* W. Haglund & M. Sorg, (Eds.) (2002) *Advances in forensic taphonomy: method, theory, and archaeological perspectives*. CRC Press, pp. 408-501; Christensen, A., Anderson, B. (2012) Methods of personal identification. *In* N. Langley & Tersigni-Tarrant (Eds.) *Forensic Anthropology: An Introduction* (1st ed.). CRC Press, pp. 397 -420.

<sup>386</sup> Bokarius, N (1925) pp. 421-432; Popov, N. (ed.) (1938) pp. 66-74 and 495 – 508; Gerasimov, M. (1949) *Osnovy vosstanovleniya litsa po cherepu*. Moscow: Sovetskaya nauka; Popov, N. (1946). pp. 455-459; Avdeev, M. (1950). pp. 312- 314; Raiskii, M. (1953) pp. 230; 338-345.

<sup>387</sup> Popov, N. (ed.) (1938) pp. 69-74.

<sup>388</sup> Popov, N. (1946) pp. 456-459.

<sup>389</sup> Avdeev, M. (1950) p. 312.



*Plate 4.4. Identification of victims: left - Identification of victims in Sokal Lviv region.; right - identification of victims of Stalag in Slavuta. 390*

#### 4.5.4. Case study: the Extraordinary Commission investigation in sovkhos "Krasnyi"<sup>391</sup>

An example of Exhumation is provided in the case of an examination of a well in sovkhos "Krasnyi".<sup>392</sup> This farm was the location of the largest death camp in Crimea during the Nazi occupation. Most of the victims were local civilians (Ukrainians, Jews, and Russians, among others). One of the mass graves was found in a well near the farm.

According to witness testimonies and material evidence found during the surveying (letters to relatives and notes from a camp doctor), the killings were often conducted during the night of 10-11<sup>th</sup> April 1944. The report is dated the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1944, which meant that the surveying had been completed 2-3 weeks from the date of the killing. The condition of corpses, described in the report, suggests that this assumption is accurate.

<sup>390</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 1063; TsDAKFFD 1-25-18-0-160423 -2

<sup>391</sup> The author appreciates Mykhaylo Tyaglyy for sharing the copy of the criminal proceeding of Shalavatov, which contained materials of the Extraordinary Commission investigation.

<sup>392</sup> USHMM/ RG-31.018M/ 20404/ vol. 39, pp.4-6 [Act of excavation of the well in sovkhos Krasnyi, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1944.](#)

"Further extraction of corpses was abandoned due to extensive decay, presence of water and blood matter from corpses and inability to conducted works inside the well even in gas mask due to physiological and medical concerns".<sup>393</sup>

The process of opening the well is also described in detail. First, witnesses who knew the details of the construction of the well (specifically, it was 24m deep) were interviewed.<sup>394</sup> A former prisoner of a nearby camp named Dmitriuk was also interviewed as he was working on digging out the well to 16m deep.<sup>395</sup> Since the bodies were still in the soft tissue decay stage, the investigation of the well was terminated at the 10m mark. The bodies were found at 4.5m deep. It is important to note here that for unknown reasons, the report does not describe the construction of the well, how much ground filling it had, the baseline of calculations, and the diameter of the well. This data would have played an important role in forensic analysis.

In the end, the Commission extracted 76 bodies that were thrown into the well head down, in a commingled fashion. The report states the following causes of death for 70 victims: 8 male bodies from the top row and two female bodies from deeper rows had signs of gunshots. 51 women, two men and seven children aged from 1.5 to 15 were, according to the experts, thrown into the well alive.<sup>396</sup> This example shows how much information could be gained if a professional was used. It also shows that the focus was on the bodies, not on the environment. This example also illustrates that many norms of the medico-legal investigation were not followed in practice.

#### **4.6. Critical Analysis**

It is logical that the first case of investigations of the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission were carried out in districts in Eastern Ukraine as these were the ones that were the first to be liberated. Since Extraordinary Commissions were just getting started, common problems that appeared in their Investigation reports included: a prolonged process of collecting evidence

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<sup>393</sup> USHMM/ RG-31.018M/ 20404/ vol. 39, p.5 [Act of excavation of the well in sovkhos Krasnyi, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1944.](#)

<sup>394</sup> USHMM/ RG-31.018M/ 20404/ vol. 39, p.5 [Act of excavation of the well in sovkhos Krasnyi, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1944.](#)

<sup>395</sup> USHMM/ RG-31.018M/ 20404/ vol. 39, p.5 [Act of excavation of the well in sovkhos Krasnyi, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1944.](#)

<sup>396</sup> USHMM/ RG-31.018M/ 20404/ vol. 39, p.5 [Act of excavation of the well in sovkhos Krasnyi, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1944.](#)

and Acts in some districts, incomplete Acts, e.g., insufficient descriptions of crimes, absence of last names or descriptions of suspects (for example, their titles, such as Head of police, Head of a military unit, commandant, etc.). Not all causes of death were accounted for, like bombardments or diversions, and some Commission members lacked proper qualifications.<sup>397</sup>

Sorokina (historian) points out that Soviet experts were essentially working in a *grey zone* (between law and ideology), and frequently had to improvise while working for the Extraordinary Commission.<sup>398</sup> Analysis of their documents indicates that both autopsies and examinations were often performed to a substandard level. The biggest problem before the WWII was the lack of personnel, and that problem became worse during it. However, the historiography of Soviet investigations provided above, and regulating documents, prove otherwise. Forensic medical practice was not absent in the USSR before WWII. The level of development of forensics allowed forensic experts to draw accurate conclusions regarding the cause and manner of death, and to separate post-mortem, perimortem or antemortem changes, especially in cases where some soft tissue remained.

However, the specifics of the Soviet legal system devalue the expert opinions from a modern legal standpoint. The most significant shortcoming was the lack of developed methodology by specialists when discovering and collecting evidence at the site (frequently done by non-specialists or hired workers), which resulted in a lot of important information being lost. Therefore, the conclusion to be made is that the facts taken from these reports should be a source of empirical data.

It is presumed that, before the 1950s, the primary method of assessment of a corpse by the Extraordinary Commission was an exterior one without an autopsy, particularly in regions where there was a shortage of specialists. In the 1950s, there was also widespread cases of external examinations and "incomplete" autopsies. These cases amounted to up to 50% of all

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<sup>397</sup> As an example, the investigation in Voroshylovgrad (now Lugans'k) region: TsDAGO/f. 1 / op. 70 / s. 22, p. 37 [Regarding atrocities of German authorities in occupied districts of Ukraine 1941-1942.](#)

<sup>398</sup> Sorokina, M. (2010) pp. 22-23.

cases in the Odesa, Kirovograd and Voroshylovgrad (Lugansk) regions.<sup>399</sup> However, a report by Sapozhnikov dated 1958 stated that "the practice of issuing reports only based on exterior examination of a corpse is virtually eliminated".<sup>400</sup>

Additionally, in the 1950s, common practice was that forensic-medical experts were not present at the sites where bodies were found, and in some cases, they never visited the locations.<sup>401</sup> The mention of the elimination of practice omissions of forensic experts at the crime scene during the evidence collection, points to the fact that it was reasonably widespread in the 1950s and required a particular strategy to avoid it. Perhaps, the roots of this practice came from the Extraordinary Commission work. That is undoubtedly explained by a lack of specialists and by the massive amounts of investigative work generated by totalitarian crimes. Indirectly, these conclusions are affirmed by an interview with a member of the Extraordinary Commission in Slavuta (Khmelnyski region).<sup>402</sup> The witness at that time was an otolaryngologist in a local hospital. Her words seem to indicate that qualified specialists did the forensic-medical expertise of corpses, but it does not seem like the experts were present during the collection of evidence. It should be noted that the basics of forensic medicine and criminalistics were part of the curriculum for students at Law Universities (court workers, prosecutors, notaries, attorneys at the Peoples Commissariat of Justice).<sup>403</sup> Therefore, it was believed these experts had the necessary knowledge to carry out the forensic aspects if forensic medics were not available to participate in some phases of an investigation.

Even though descriptions of wounds and injuries were the most crucial part of the forensic expert reports, they were frequently ignored by the Regional Extraordinary Commissions. This could be explained by the fact that the analysis was not done by forensic experts but by local doctors. Furthermore, a significant degree of body decay was mentioned, so it can be presumed that only a visual examination of bodies was conducted.

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<sup>399</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 1, p. 14 [Medico-legal expertise in Ukrainian SSR and perspective of its development in 1949.](#)

<sup>400</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 30, p. 135 [Medico-legal expertise in Ukraine during last 40 years..](#)

<sup>401</sup> TsDAVO f. 5149/ op. 1/ s. 1, p. 15 [Medico-legal expertise in Ukrainian SSR and perspective of its development in 1949.](#)

<sup>402</sup> YIUA 889 U.

<sup>403</sup> TsDAVO f. 8/ op. 1/ s. 3(11), p. 56 =



The problem with victim counts as reported by the Commission needs to be examined separately. For instance, an investigation report of the well in sovkhos "Krasnyi" (the Crimea) mentions 76 bodies extracted from the well up to 10 m, but the remaining 14 m were not investigated. The report states that according to expert opinion, there were up to 245-250 bodies. This was calculated by dividing the number of found bodies (76) by the perimeter of the site where they were found (5.5m). Experts assumed that each meter of the well contained 12-13 corpses (which is not entirely accurate since  $76/5.5 = 13.8$ , so almost 14 bodies). The experts took the minimal amount of 12, multiplied it by the remaining depth of 14m and produced an approximate number of bodies.<sup>404</sup> These calculations have no basis as they are founded on unverified information and inaccurate estimates, e.g., the depth of 24m was taken based on witness testimony, and was not verified by digging to the end of the well. It is also unclear whether there were ground layers between body layers and their positioning in deeper layers, factors which would influence the number of bodies present.

Most likely, the experts involved in the Commission were using the same tactic of counting victims; they first measured the approximate dimension of the burial site (sometimes by visual inspection, without digging). Then the burial site was either fully or partially excavated, and the average amount of bodies per square meter, layer, etc., was calculated. Approximate depth was estimated (by digging, questioning witnesses that either saw the pit being dug out or participated in digging, prodding with a rod, etc.), and by a simple arithmetic operation (multiplication of the number of bodies per layer by several layers, a number of bodies per square meter times the approximate size of burial), an approximate number of bodies was provided. It is impossible to claim that this was done everywhere, but most likely, this approach was the most common in the Extraordinary Commission investigations (see more information in Chapters 5 and 6).

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<sup>404</sup> USHMM/ RG-31.018M/ 20404/ vol. 3, p.6 [Act of excavation of the well in sovkhos Krasnyi, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1944.](#)

#### **4.7. Conclusions**

The work of all Extraordinary Commissions provides essential factual material for Holocaust studies. In reality, in cases of Exhumation of victims, these were the first forensic archaeological investigations in the USSR. The methods and approaches used, developed more organically as the investigations were taking place. However, in order to interpret factual evidence correctly, there needs to be a clear understanding of the aims and methods that were imposed and used during the work of the Commission. It is important to remember that even before WWII, there was an extensive network of forensic-medical expertise in the USSR that had clear instructions on how to conduct the investigations. Furthermore, based on the above, many non-specialist doctors were engaged in place of experts. So, despite an apparent lack of personnel, it is incorrect to state that these specialists did not exist. These examples illustrate that all work, in most cases, followed the prescribed orders. However, the particulars of the Soviet legal system, first and foremost, the operation under the control of a totalitarian state and lack of experience of mass grave site investigations, devalue the quality of expert opinions from a modern legal standpoint. The most significant shortfall was the lack of a developed methodology of steps of action by specialists when discovering and collecting evidence at the site (frequently done by non-specialists or hired workers), which resulted in a lot of important information being lost. Therefore, the conclusion to be made is that the data taken from these reports should be a source of factual material. However, working with them requires a particular approach. On the one hand, the aim of these reports has to be understood. On the other hand, they need to account for methods and knowledge base available to the specialists in the 1940s. The most questionable results are the number of victims due to a subjective view and lack of comprehensive fieldwork.

## 5. The Holocaust in Slavuta: Jewish mass graves

*Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions*

*Primo Levi*

### 5.1. Introduction

Slavuta is located in what is presently defined as the Khmel'nitski region in Ukraine. In 2012, the population of the city was 35,500.<sup>405</sup> It is designated as a regionally significant city and a district centre. The city is part of the Volhynia historical region. This territory had been settled with Ashkenazi Jewish communities since the Middle Ages, being practically in the middle of the region known as the Pale of Settlement (see Fig. 5.1.). As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, Slavuta had a sizeable Jewish community and also hosted a military regiment, which served as a border patrol before WWII. The terrain was converted to a PoW camp for injured captured soldiers during the occupation in 1941.<sup>406</sup> Because of this, the best approach is to separate the study of the fate of Slavuta's Jewish population and the fate of inmates of PoW camp in Slavuta into distinct chapters. Whilst these events happened within the same landscape, this division is necessary due to different sources and variance in the mechanisms of extermination and burial, an understanding of which played a crucial role in the accurate interpretation of the forensic archaeological data collected during this study.

The purpose of this chapter is the reconstruction of the fate of the local Jewish community based on the combination and cross-referencing of different types of sources including historical documents, non-invasive archaeological data (collected by the author) and

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<sup>405</sup> *Entsyklopediya istorii Ukrainy* (2012) Volume 9, Kyiv: Naukova dumka, p. 623.

<sup>406</sup> Danter, Sz. (1968) *Prestupleniya nemetsko-vashytskogo wermakhta v otnoshenii voyennoplennykh vo Vtoroi Mirovoi voine*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo inostrannoi literatury, pp. 428-429 Shneyer, A. (2005) *Plen*, . *Sovetskiye voyennoplennyye v Germanii 1941-1945*. Moscow: Mosty kul'tury; Berkovskii, V. (2014) *Natsysts'ki tabory dlia viiskovopolonenykh v m. Slavuta (1941-1944r.)* Available at: <http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/zabuti-zertvy-viyny/1271-vladyslav-berkovskiyi-natsystski-tabory-dlia-viiskovopolonenykh-v-m-slavuta-1941-1944-r> (Accessed on: 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021).

eyewitness testimonies. An essential component is using innovative methodology derived from forensic archaeology and post-war eyewitness testimonies to verify the Extraordinary Commission's reports. Further details about these approaches have already been provided in Chapter 3.

Research into the Jewish community in Slavuta during the Holocaust centred on the following research questions:

- (1) What information is available from Soviet sources concerning the executions of Jewish people in Slavuta and how accurate is it?
- (2) Can non-invasive archaeological methods assist with the identification of Jewish mass graves near the Water Tower in Slavuta?
- (3) What contribution does the cross-comparison of different types of sources make in terms of documenting the fate of the Jewish community in Slavuta?

Due to the necessity to understand Holocaust-era events in the area, this chapter begins with the historical background relevant to the Jewish community in Slavuta before and during the Nazi-Soviet War.

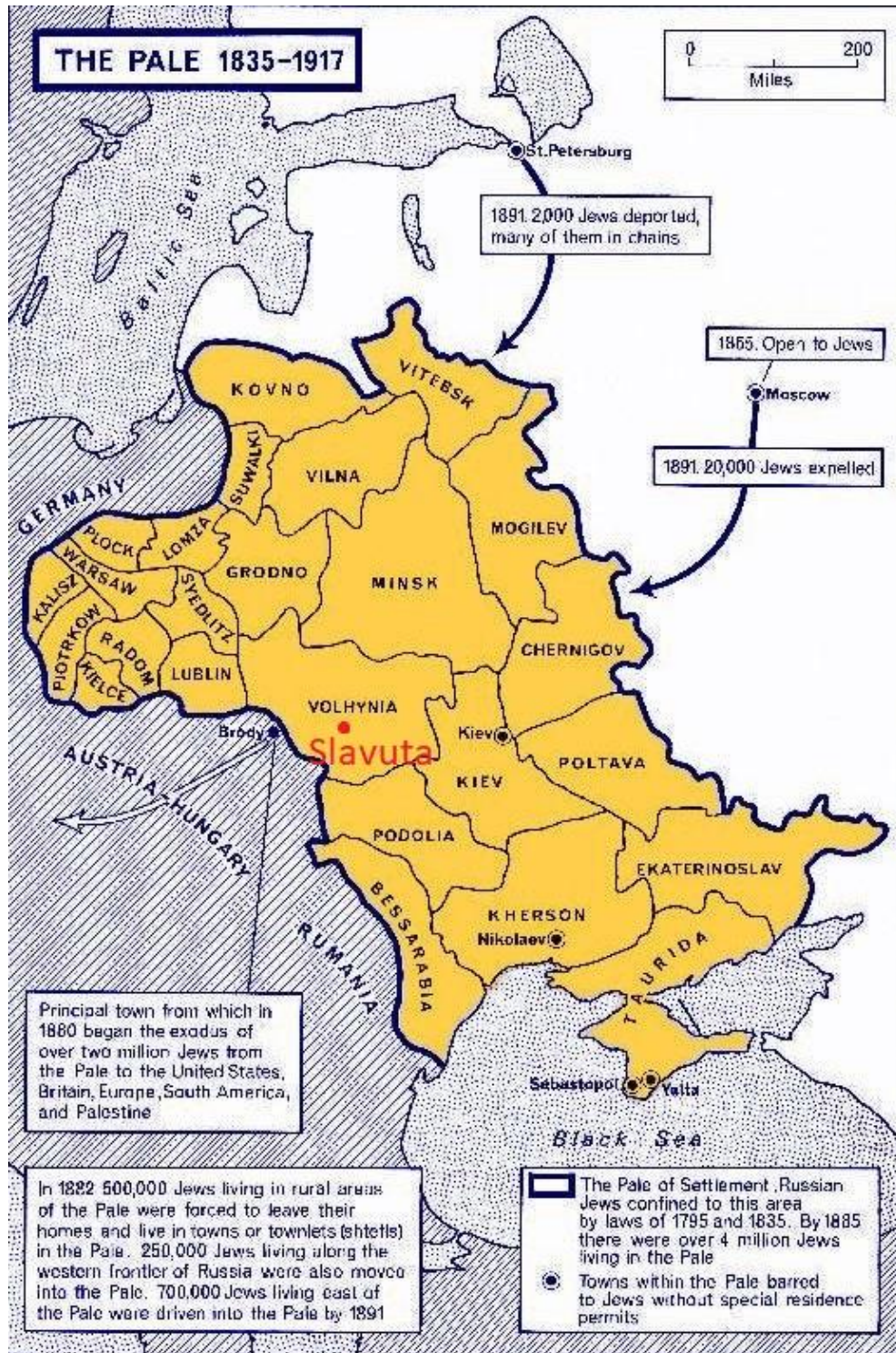


Fig.5.1. Pale of Settlement according to Martin Gilbert.<sup>407</sup>

<sup>407</sup> Gilbert, M. (2010) *The Routledge Atlas of Jewish History*. London: Routledge.

## 5.2. Historical background

In 1926, the Jewish population in Slavuta amounted to 4,701 individuals or 45% of the total population.<sup>408</sup> There were six active synagogues, although three were closed shortly after 1926 due to the Soviet anti-religious policy. During the era of the Industrialisation (1929 – 1941), many Jews moved to larger cities.<sup>409</sup> Therefore, the Jewish population of Slavuta increased to 5,344 in the mid-1930s, altering the social and ethnic structure of the region.<sup>410</sup> Before the Nazi Occupation, Slavuta was the centre of the Slavuta district and an important industrial heartland. Among the factories located there were a Machine-Tractor station – a special agricultural support factory in the USSR that maintained equipment used in kolkhoz (collective farms); a paper factory, a canning factory, a timber factory, glass and porcelain factory; food production facilities.<sup>411</sup> Interestingly enough, until the late 1930s, many of these factories there were closed on Saturdays and religious holidays due to the sizeable Jewish community.<sup>412</sup>

As of 1933, the official population of the Slavuta district amounted to 102,451, out of which 11,137 lived in Slavuta proper. By ethnic composition, there were 82,686 Ukrainians, 1,265 Russians, 10,461 Jews, 7,004 Poles, 274 Germans, and 771 Czechs.<sup>413</sup> There were also ethnic kolhoz's formed out of national communities; two were Jewish.<sup>414</sup> Today, however, there is only one synagogue remaining in Slavuta as a result of several episodes of mass violence, which will be discussed below.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> *Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1926 goda (1928)* Volume XII: Ukainskaya Sotsyalisticheskaya Sovetskaya Respublika: Pravoberezhnyi podrayon; Levoberezhnyi podrayon. Moscow: Izdanie TsSU Soiuza SSR.

<sup>409</sup> Yakubova, L. (2011) *Povsiakdenne zhyttia etnichnykh menshyn radians'koi Ukrainy u mizhvoyennu dobu*. Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukrainy, p. 187

<sup>410</sup> Yakubova, L. (2011) p. 188.

<sup>411</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 597 **Military-geographical description. Handbook for north Rightbank area of Ukraine.** ,p. 104; *Istoriia mist i sil Ukrain's'koi RSR: Khmel'nyts'ka oblast'* (1971) Kyiv: AN URSR, pp. 464-465.

<sup>412</sup> Yakubova, L. (2011) p. 263

<sup>413</sup> *Natsional'na knyga pam'ati zhertv Holodomoru 1932-1933 rokiv v Ukraini: Khmel'nyts'ka oblast'* (2008) Part 1. Khmel'nyts'kii, p. 366.

<sup>414</sup> *Natsional'na knyga*(2008) Part 1,p. 366.

<sup>415</sup> *Jewish Cemeteries, Synagogues and Mass graves in Ukraine* (2005) p. 90.

It would be remiss to talk about the history of Slavuta without considering the theme of Soviet terror. That said, the topic of State terror in the Soviet Union is a broad field of research, and it is impossible to mention all types and mechanisms of repression in Soviet Ukraine. Hence, in this section, only the most relevant types of oppression and persecution for the Slavuta region are presented.

Slavuta's population had to suffer the Holodomor (the Great Famine) (1932-1933) in the same way as most of modern Ukraine. In 1928, the Soviet Union began a new economic strategy known as the First Five-Year Plan. The goal of this plan was rapid industrialisation of the country and forced collectivisation of the agricultural region, mainly Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine.<sup>416</sup> Ukrainian peasants resisted this process because collectivisation meant losing private property and collective ownership for everything, including equipment, cattle and harvest. In other words, the benefits from the work did not depend on the efforts of each individual.<sup>417</sup> Due to that, Ukrainian peasants avoided becoming members of kolkhozes and preferred individual households. As a result, the First Five-Year Plan was not fully met, and this included a failure to meet agricultural supply targets for the state. Failure of collectivisation, the Soviet campaign against kulaks (prosperous peasants who were determined as a class enemy in the Soviet Union), and the eradication of Ukrainian culture were real motivations for the Holodomor, contrary to official claims made about drought and failed harvests. The mechanisms of mass starvation as a tool of the Soviet State Police were (1) unrealistic targets for mandatory agricultural supplies to the State; (2) prohibition of free movement for peasants (Soviet peasants did not have a passport until 1974 and any travel had to be approved by local

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<sup>416</sup> Conquest, R. (1986) *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 92-93.

<sup>417</sup> Marochko, V. (2007) *Holodomor 1932-1933*. Kyiv, pp. 5-8.

authorities)<sup>418</sup>; (3) a Blacklist system – the total restriction of access to and from the village or kolkhoz<sup>419</sup>; (4) the criminalisation of gleaning<sup>420</sup>.

According to The Memorial Book of Ukraine for the Khmel'nitski region, 1,500 people died from starvation and related complications in the Slavuta district.<sup>421</sup> 90 of them were in Slavuta, 74 of them were Jews.<sup>422</sup> These numbers are underestimated since many death registration books have not been preserved; they were frequently purposefully destroyed and many deaths were not recorded at all. Witness testimonies provide some data, but this topic only became available for research in Ukraine after the Independence in 1991, by which time many witnesses of famine had already died. Most oral history testimonies were collected from those that were teens or children at that time, and in a lot of cases, from those retelling stories from their already deceased relatives. Also, many families were deported from the region during the fight against kulaks, spying and other repression campaigns.

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<sup>418</sup> Dzhuva, V. (2013) 'Bezpasportne kripatstvo.' *Tyzhden*, 25 August 2013 Available at: <http://tyzhden.ua/Publication/3814> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

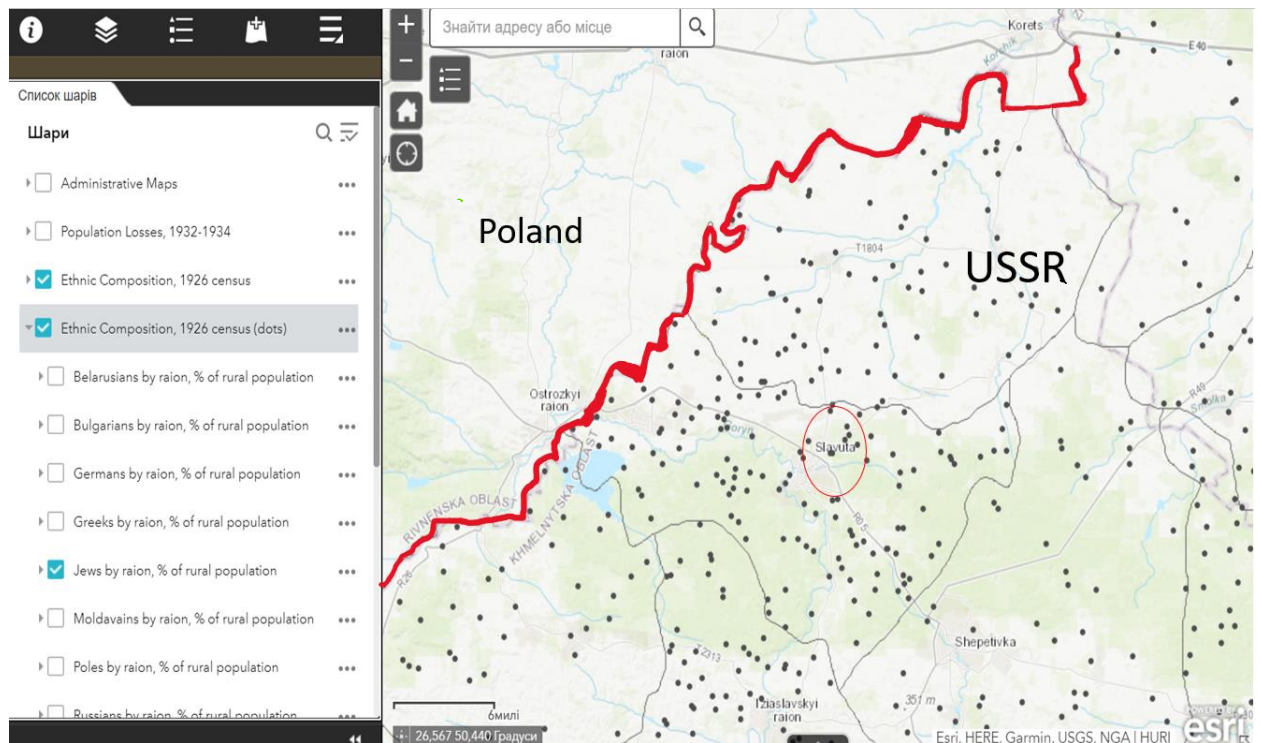
<sup>419</sup> NB: the reason for that was a failing of agricultural supplies norms or resistance of locals (riots). In addition to total blockade of the settlement, the local community had to fulfil (sometimes overfulfill) the norms; Applebaum, A. (2017) *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*, Penguin Randomhouse, ch. 7; Papakin, H. (2009) "'Blacklists' as a Tool of the Soviet Genocide in Ukraine'. *Holodomor Studies*. Vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter–Spring 2009).

<sup>420</sup> NB: For many peasants, the collecting of leftover crops from kolkhoz fields was the only chance to survive during the Holodomor. Mainly children and teenagers were responsible for this. According to the Law of Spikelets or Law of 5 Spikelets (the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1932), the gleaning of the grains even after the harvest was cropped equated to theft of State property. The highest punishment for that could be even execution by shooting. This Law received its name because the death penalty could be sentenced even after the gleaning of minimum crops (such as 5 spikelets), or tainted or over-frozen vegetables, fruits or grains.

<sup>421</sup> *Natsional'na knyga* (2008) Part 2, pp.591-651.

<sup>422</sup> *Natsional'na knyga pam'ati zhertv Holodomoru 1932-1933 rokiv v Ukraini: Khmel'nyts'ka oblast'* (2008) Part 2. Khmel'nyts'kii, pp. 642-651





*Fig. 5.2. Jewish population in Slavuta district according to 1926 census (Jewish settlements marked as grey dots) and Polish-Soviet border before 1939 (based on Mapa project: The Great Famine in Ukraine 1932-34) (red circle – Slavuta’s location).*

Until 1939, Slavuta was located on the Polish-Soviet border (see Fig. 5.2.). This fact was a cause for massive campaigns against imaginary Polish (or other) spies. One of the most significant trials was against a fake Polish Military organisation in 1933-1935. According to the prosecution, the aim of this organisation was sabotaging factories and regiments of the Red Army.<sup>423</sup> Seven people from Slavuta and the region were arrested in 1934 and charged as members, following which they were executed by shooting. However, this trial is only one example of State terror in Slavuta. Although it only provides a summary to aid understanding of the history of Soviet Terror in Slavuta, Table 5.1. provides more information about critical characteristics of repressions in this region.

<sup>423</sup> Yakubova, L. (2011) p. 267

<b>Soviet repressive bodies in Slavuta</b>	<b>Accusation (mentioned only crimes where individuals were rehabilitated)</b>	<b>Types of punishment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slavuta border patrol of the State Political Directorate</li>   <li>• Special department of the People Commissariat of Internal Affairs in Slavuta</li>   <li>• Special Council of the OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate), later Special Council of the NKVD (the People Commissariat of Internal Affairs in Slavuta)</li>   <li>• The Special troika (three officials charged by the NKVD for simplified, speedy investigation without a public and fair trial) of the Kamianets'-Podil's'ki region. Possible it had special sessions in Slavuta</li>   <li>• The military trial of the Kyiv military district</li>   <li>• The Procurator's office of Shepetivka</li>   <li>• Police department (militsia)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership in counterrevolution organisation</li>   <li>• Anti-Soviet activity</li>   <li>• Spying</li>   <li>• Illegal crossing the border</li>   <li>• Anti-Soviet agitation or propaganda</li>   <li>• An unreliable person or dangerous person</li>   <li>• Absenteeism or not meeting working norms</li>   <li>• Member of a family of the traitor of the Motherland (including newborns and toddlers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Execution by shooting</li>   <li>• Deportation from the region to another region of Ukraine or another part of the Soviet Union (usually Kazakhstan or the North)</li>   <li>• Imprisonment in concentration or labour camp</li>   <li>• Disfranchisement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrest</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 5.1. Soviet repressions in Slavuta.<sup>424</sup>

<sup>424</sup> Based on biographical information the Soviet repression victims from Slavuta and vicinities: *Reabilitovani istoriyeyu* (2012) Gavrishko, D., et al (Eds.), Book 4, Khmel'nytskii; *Reabilitovani istoriyeyu* (2015) Zagorodnyi, V., et al (Eds.), Book 6, Khmel'nytskii.

The annexation of Western Ukrainian territories led to increasing political repression against various ethnic groups in the region. For example, the Polish community of Slavuta became an object of the Soviet deportation policy after September 1939. Many Polish families living in that territory were deported to other regions of the Soviet Union. Applebaum explained that the Soviet regime wanted to minimise the possibility of revolts and to "sovietise" the region as soon as possible.<sup>425</sup> According to Snyder, in four major campaigns, 292,513 Polish nationals were deported to remote parts of the Soviet Union from the former borderlands (including Slavuta) in the first months of the Soviet occupation.<sup>426</sup> Another 200,000 shared their fate during more minor actions. These repressive campaigns affected mostly Poles and Soviet Jews (national minorities).<sup>427</sup>

In summary, it is essential to understand that many burials of victims of pre-war repressions and the Holodomor in Slavuta and vicinity were never discovered. Searching for these burials requires further study, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, some sites will be discussed in this thesis because of the possibility that the same sites were used in Slavuta for the burials of victims of different regimes.

### **5.3. The Nazi occupation of Slavuta and extermination of the Jewish community**

#### **5.3.1. Background**

The Nazi occupation of the city began on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1941. The new administration of the city registered 1,391 Jews at that time, whilst the Jewish community of the broader Slavuta district was 6,512 Jews and 5,102 among them lived in city of Slavuta in 1939.<sup>428</sup> Presumably, some

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NB: All information in columns provided in random order, not related to the information in the next section. For example, Anti-Soviet agitation or propaganda could be charged with execution by shooting; Deportation from the region to another region of Ukraine or another part of the Soviet Union (usually Kazakhstan or the North); Imprisonment in concentration or labour camp; Disfranchisement; Arrest.

<sup>425</sup> Applebaum, A. (2017) p. 331.

<sup>426</sup> NB: GULAG (The Chief Administration of the Camps) – the major instrument of the repression in the Soviet Union. That was a government agency for management of the Soviet network of the forced labour camps.

<sup>427</sup> Snaider, T. (2017) *Chorna zemlia*. Kyiv: Meduza, p. 115.

<sup>428</sup> Kruglov, A., Umansky, A. and Shchupak, I.(2016) p. 539 and 521.

Jews were conscripted into the Red Army or used the chance to be evacuated with Soviet organisations or industrial facilities before the occupation.

The first mass extermination of Jews took place soon after the Nazi occupation and some categories of men were killed first (Jews, Communists) for resistance prevention and intimidation. According to Snyder's explanation, during the first phase of WWII on the Eastern front, the main task of the Einsatzgruppen was to eliminate those groups that were the "foundation" of the Soviet regime.<sup>429</sup> Kruglov argued that several dozen of Jews were shot, allegedly for supporting the Communist regime, by the 1<sup>st</sup> SS-Motorised Infantry Brigade within Slavuta and vicinity on the 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> July 1941, and 1,298 Jews from Slavuta were killed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Company of the 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Police Battalion during the period from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August 1941.<sup>430</sup>

After the liberation of Slavuta, witness Dombrovskii testified how he saw the first execution of a group of Soviet workers and specialists' (Jews?), totalling 800 people.<sup>431</sup> The process of execution was being worked out during these first actions before being applied later during other mass executions in Slavuta. Unfortunately, there is no mention of the approximate date of execution and no reference to the accurate location of the killing sites or mass graves. Dombrovskii does however mention the mass killings on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1941, when the location of mass graves was described as "the big pit close to the road to Shepetivka in woodland".<sup>432</sup> His statement was also confirmed by local catholic priest Milevski. He recalled that in the very first days of occupation, the Germans arrested local Soviet activists, some Jews and communists according to a list created in advance. He presumed that all those people were shot.<sup>433</sup> Another eyewitness, Shatalov, stated that about 300 Jewish men were killed in the

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<sup>429</sup> Snaider, T. (2017) p. 136.

<sup>430</sup> *The USHMM Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, (2012) Volume. 2, *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe, part B*, p. 1469; Kruglov, A., Umansky, A. and Shchupak, I. (2016) p. 522.

<sup>431</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885.

<sup>432</sup> Kruglov, A. (2002) *Sbornik dokumentov i materialov ob unichtozhenii natsystami evreev Ukrainy v 1941-1944*. Kyiv: Institut iudaiki, p. 291.

<sup>433</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s. 6, p. 106 [Testimony of D. Milevskii](#).

beginning of the occupation and about 400-500 men and women (he did not mention their ethnicity but implied that they were Jews) in September 1941.<sup>434</sup>

In a few days, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1941, an order was issued demanding a contribution from the Jewish community of Slavuta to the amount of 20 thousand rubles (Soviet currency).<sup>435</sup> According to the newspaper *Podolianyn/Der Podolier* published in Kamianets-Podilskii (the capital of the region), the official price for a loaf of bread (1 kg) was 0.6 rubles per kilogram (the actual price usually was higher).<sup>436</sup> In addition, the salary of local administration (Uprava) workers was 600 – 1,000 rubles per month in August 1941 (it appears to be the highest salary for non-German workers in the city).<sup>437</sup> This money had to be paid by on 30<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>438</sup> The same demand was placed upon the Jewish community of Annopil near Slavuta.<sup>439</sup> Similar queries were likely made to Jewish communities in other towns and villages near Slavuta. And, perhaps, this was not met as a group of 911 Jews (possibly from Krasnostav) were executed on 31<sup>st</sup> August.<sup>440</sup> The next decree was issued on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1941, according to which the Jewish community had to deliver 80,000 rubles of contribution by 15<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>441</sup> Most likely, a similar decree was issued for Jews of Slavuta. It is also reasonable to assume that another round of executions followed this, but no evidence has been found to prove this theory. According to the German reports 4,144 Jews were killed in Slavuta and vicinities by early September 1941.<sup>442</sup>

Jews of the region were differentiated from other nationalities and had to mark themselves. For example, from 6<sup>th</sup> September 1941, the Jewish population in Gebietkommissariat of Shepetivka (administrative unit on the occupied territory), including those in Slavuta, had to

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<sup>434</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 176 [Testimony of A. Shatalov](#).

<sup>435</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) *Zhyttia v okupatsii. Slavuta i Slavutchyna v 1941-1943 rr.* Kyiv-Khmel'nytskii: Poligrafist-2, p. 54

<sup>436</sup> Diisno z 1 IX 1941 roku novi tsiny na produkty(1941)*Podolianyn/ Der Podolier*. Available at: <https://libraria.ua/issues/182/1925/?PageNumber=2&ArticleId=410179&Search=%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%201941> (Accessed: 15 December 2022).

<sup>437</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 61.

<sup>438</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 54.

<sup>439</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 55.

<sup>440</sup> Kruglov, A., Umansky, A. and Shchupak, I.(2016) p. 525.

<sup>441</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 67.

<sup>442</sup> YVA TR 10/1597/1, p.6 [List of mass executions on the occupied territories](#).

switch from wearing a white armband with Star of David to "a yellow circle on left breast side and one on the back, 8 cm in diameter, either from cloth or stitched out".<sup>443</sup> Non-compliance with this order carried a fine of 1,000 rubles. This type of identification had to be implemented in Slavuta by 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1941.<sup>444</sup> It is reasonable to assume that these changes were done periodically in order to increase penalties for Jews and provide more causes for punishments and killings. In addition, Jews were restricted from communicating with non-Jewish inhabitants of Slavuta.

A ghetto was created in Slavuta on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1942. Local Jews and those from surrounding villages were placed there. It seems that children from mixed marriages were also imprisoned.<sup>445</sup> The ghetto looked like an open space without any buildings surrounded by barbed wire (Figure 5.3. and Plate 5.1.). Possibly, it was located beyond the Jewish cemeteries.<sup>446</sup> Most likely, Jewish real estate was transferred to the administration of the Slavuta housing bureau. An order was issued on 4<sup>th</sup> March asking an employee of that bureau, Svetsitsii, to guard the houses (possibly from their former owners trying to get into them) and seek those hiding inside.<sup>447</sup> For some time, particular Jewish specialists were allowed to work outside the ghetto: for example, a venereologist at Slavuta's hospital, Kharmats, was issued a special permit for work outside the ghetto from 8 AM till 8 PM.<sup>448</sup> Some buildings were requested for use by other Slavuta communities: for instance, in August 1943, Slavuta's community of the Evangelical Christianity church requested the use of the former Jewish school on Banna Street as their house of prayer, with the obligation to repair it.<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 34.

<sup>444</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 82.

<sup>445</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 176 [Testimony of A. Shatalov](#).

<sup>446</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 238, p. 60 [Testimony of N. Belyi](#).

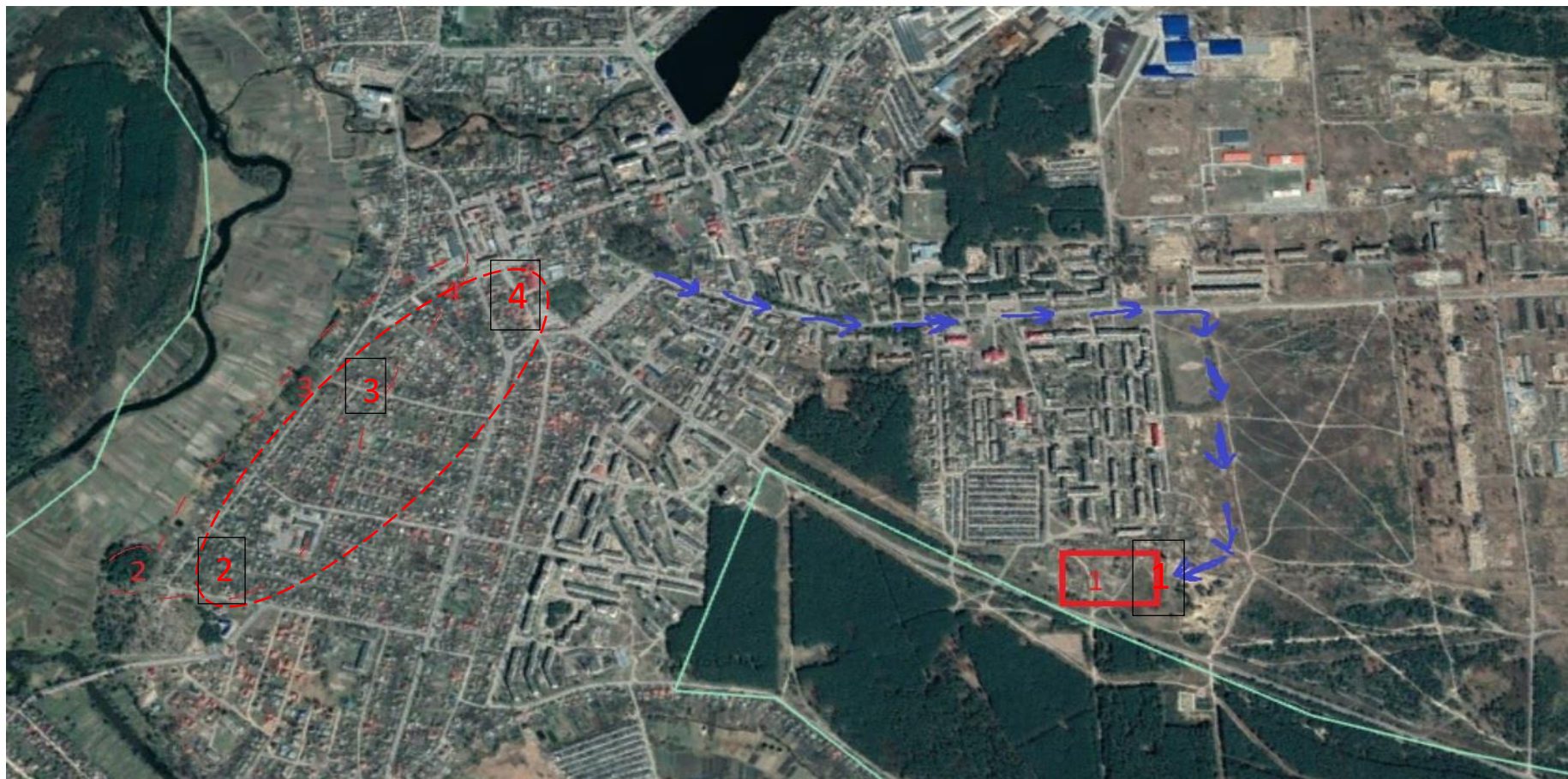
<sup>447</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 136.

<sup>448</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 138.

<sup>449</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) p. 175.



*Plate 5.1. Monuments at the territory of the ghetto (Author's own photos. 15/08/2020)*



*Fig. 5.3. Plan of Jewish Holocaust sites in Slavuta, created by the author based on eyewitness testimonies and site visits:*

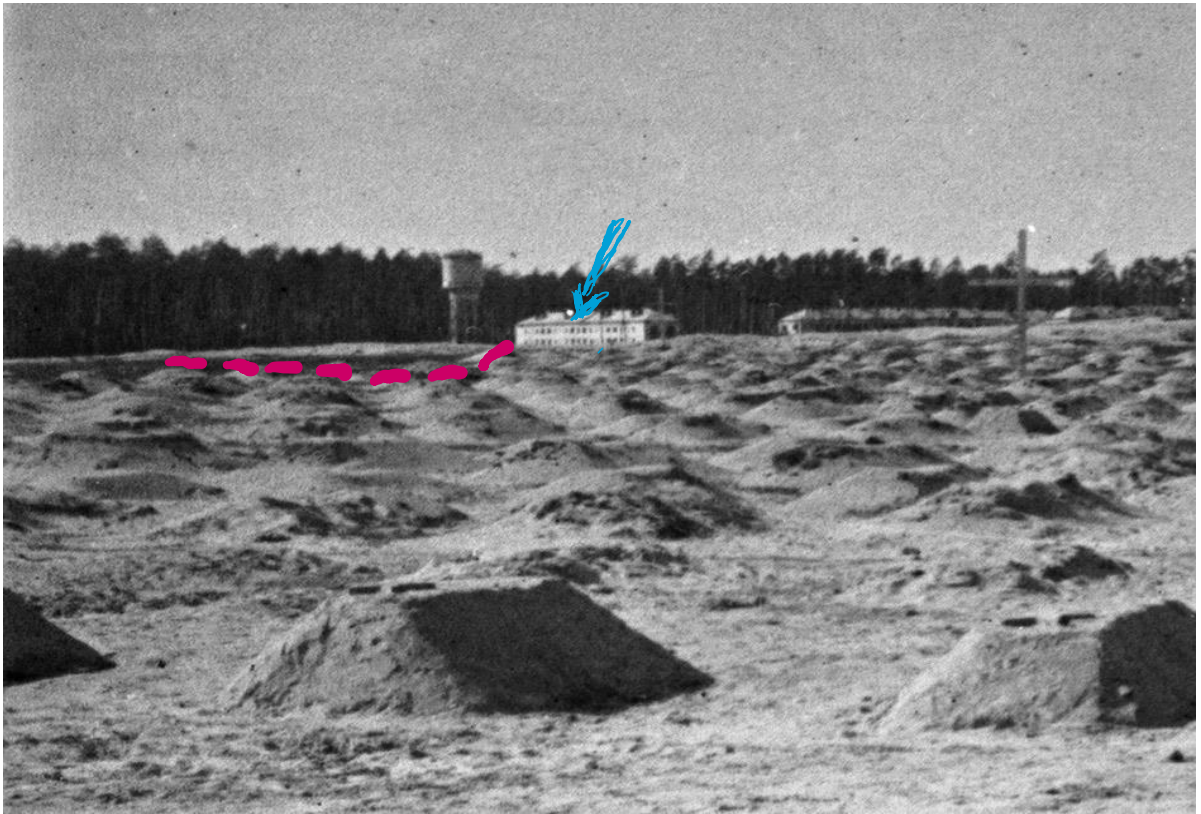
*KEY: 1 Mass graves near the Water Tower; 2 Jewish cemetery (new); 3 Jewish cemetery (old) 4 The location of the ghetto victim's monument*

*— — — Approximate Ghetto area*

*→ → Possible route Jewish victims from the ghetto to the killing site.*



The largest scale exterminations took place at the edge of the Slavuta in 1942 (the former sand quarry near the Water tower, Plate 5.4.). Eyewitnesses recalled various dates (e.g. June 1942<sup>450</sup>, July 1942<sup>451</sup>; 5<sup>th</sup> June 1942<sup>452</sup>; or 26<sup>th</sup> June 1942.<sup>453</sup>), but most of them referred summer of 1942.<sup>454</sup> All eyewitnesses mentioned multiple mass shootings near the Water Tower involving between 300 and 800 Jewish people. Perhaps, during those mass executions, most of the local Jews from Slavuta were killed.<sup>455</sup> According to the former worker of the PoW camp Shatalov, the Jewish specialists and artisans were shot later, on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1942.<sup>456</sup>



*Plate 5.2. The Water Tower and the nearest barrack (point from where eyewitness Gei watched the execution, blue arrow); pink dash-dot line – mass grave location, in the foreground – graves at the PoW camp cemetery.<sup>457</sup>*

<sup>450</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 174 [Testimony of A. Daniliuk.](#)

<sup>451</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 106 [Testimony of D. Milevskii.](#)

<sup>452</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 7 [Testimony of N. Belyi.](#)

<sup>453</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 176 [Testimony of A. Shatalov.](#)

<sup>454</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 48 [Testimony of V. Zhmuidanovich.](#)

<sup>455</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 177 [Testimony of A. Shatalov.](#)

<sup>456</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 177 [Testimony of A. Shatalov.](#)

<sup>457</sup> TDAKFFD 1-25-18-0-160424-3

The killings continued into 1943. Another eyewitness, Fillipov, mentioned individual murders near the Water Tower in the winter of 1943 (perhaps, in January or February 1943).<sup>458</sup> Valiaiev, who arrived at the camp in March 1943, recalls witnessing several groups of men and women, and sometimes children, being led to the graves beyond the first block that spring. According to other PoW's, they were being killed there, and PoW's were closing the graves.<sup>459</sup> Probably, the last mass execution occurred in September 1943.<sup>460</sup> There could have been Jews from the vicinity of Slavuta executed at that time and Jews that were found hiding. It is probable that further such actions were taking place as well.

Finally, it seems that not all Jews housed in Slavuta were killed in 1942 and 1943; some Jews from the ghetto in Slavuta managed to flee from there. For example, a local inhabitant Shatalov married a Jewish woman who could help to break his child free from the ghetto, and this child survived.<sup>461</sup> Available sources do not provide a sense of how many local Jews survived, but it is indisputable that survivors were in the minority.

#### **5.4. The Soviet Investigation of Nazi crimes in Slavuta**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Red Army soldiers and officers were usually the first to record Nazi crimes in liberated cities and towns. The same happened in Slavuta, three days after the First Ukrainian Front troops arrived in the city on 15th January 1944. Due to the scale of atrocities, the First Act (18<sup>th</sup> January 1944)<sup>462</sup>, the Second Act (25<sup>th</sup> January 1944)<sup>463</sup>, the Memorandum of the Political Directorate of the First Ukrainian Front (1<sup>st</sup> February 1944)<sup>464</sup> and the Minutes of camp survey (8<sup>th</sup> February 1944)<sup>465</sup> focused on the PoW camp. The first mention of the extermination of the Jewish community in Slavuta appeared in another version

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<sup>458</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 159 [Testimony of V. Filippov.](#)

<sup>459</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 238, p.93 [Testimony of S. Valiayev.](#)

<sup>460</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 2. F. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 814, p. 155 [Testimony of M. Kavunets.](#)

<sup>461</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 171 [Testimony of A. Shatalov.](#)

<sup>462</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 1062, p. 166 [The Act of survey of the camp area, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1944.](#)

<sup>463</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, pp. 16-18 [Act of the camp survey, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1944.](#)

<sup>464</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 1062, p. 165 [The Act of survey of the camp area, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1944.](#)

<sup>465</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, pp.19-23 [Minutes of the camp survey, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944.](#)

of the Second Act (25<sup>th</sup> January 1944).<sup>466</sup> This Act was completed by almost the same people as the previous one, but for some reason, only one of the Acts contained information about Jewish victims. A comprehensive investigation of the Nazi Crimes in Slavuta, with members of the Extraordinary Commission, took place in Slavuta only on 20<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> April 1944.<sup>467</sup> The forensic experts led by Sapozhnikov, Smirnov and Bokarius were involved in this survey. The following possibilities could explain the delay with the start of the investigation: (1) forensic experts were involved in other cases; (2) the scale of crimes and propagandistic potential required the participation of the most skilled/experienced experts; (3) the weather and/or ground condition did not allow excavations of mass graves.<sup>468</sup> The essential component of this exercise was an excavation of mass graves and subsequent medical examination of corpses. As a result, the medico-forensic report was completed, describing details of the crime and mass grave locations (including a plan of mass graves Figure 5.4.).

The Soviet experts surveyed seven mass grave locations for two weeks in April 1944, and further in this and following chapters, original numerations and descriptions from the Soviet medico-forensic report are used to mark the locations. For the purpose of this doctoral thesis, not all locations were investigated due to time and scope, but a sample were examined to demonstrate the potential of forensic archaeological approaches. Further investigations in Slavuta are required and will hopefully be initiated by the author in the future. The following section describes the Extraordinary Commission results and highlights which facts need to be verified based on contemporary knowledge and via the application of forensic archaeological approaches.

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<sup>466</sup> GDA SBU in Khmel'nyts'ka region (DaKhm) s. 12338, p. 75-76 [Act of survey of the camp area, 18th January 1944.](#)

<sup>467</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, pp. 68 -80 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>468</sup> NB: the weather reports for Kyiv (in 250 km from Slavuta) said that sub-zero temperatures kept until mid-April 1944: *Arkhiv pogody po gorodam SNG (19 I 20 veka) (1944) Available at: [http://thermo.karelia.ru/weather/w\\_history.php?town=kie&month=1&year=1944](http://thermo.karelia.ru/weather/w_history.php?town=kie&month=1&year=1944)* (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

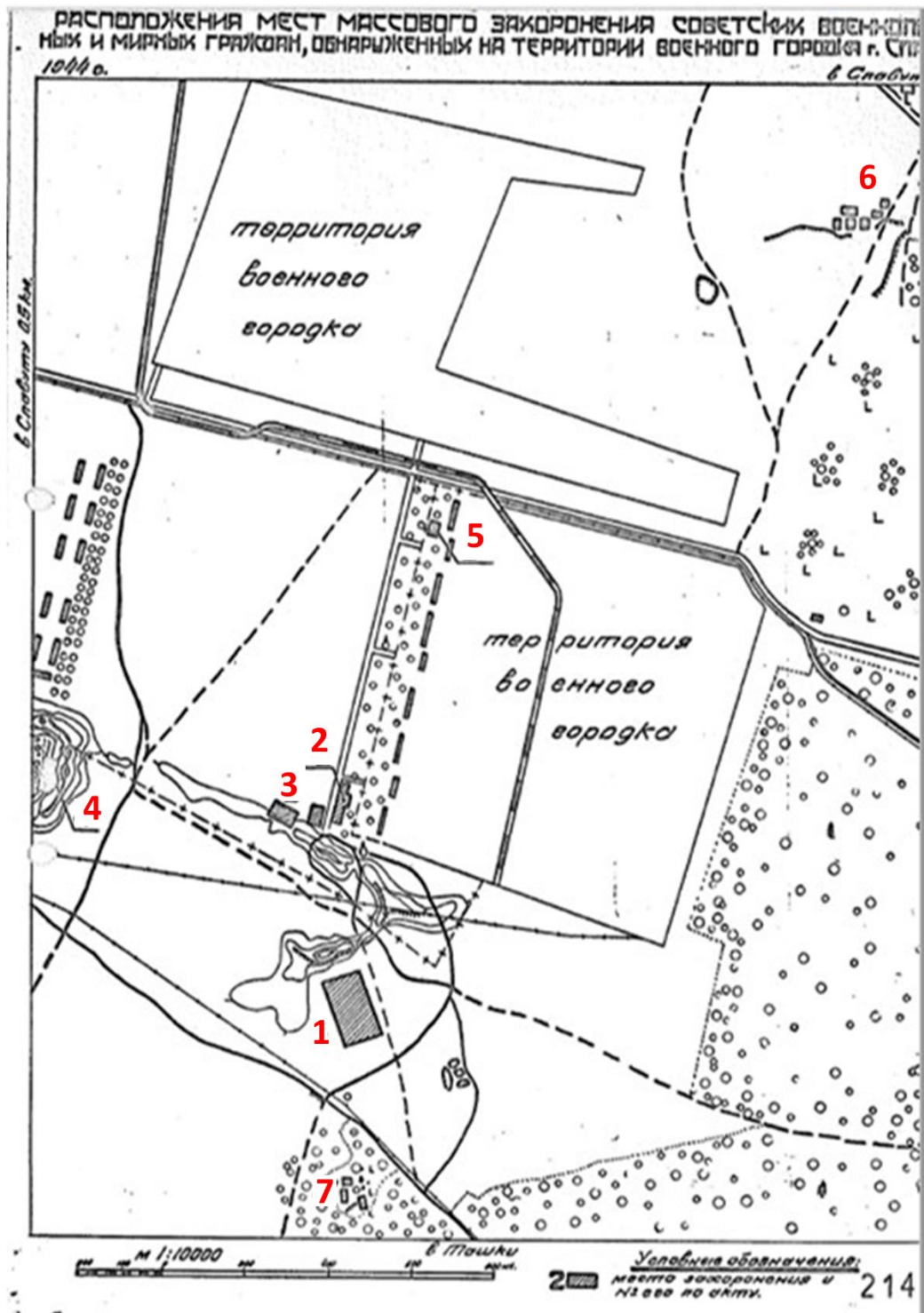


Fig. 5.4. Mass grave location marked by the Extraordinary Commission members in April 1944 <sup>469</sup>: (1) (2) (3) (5) mass graves of the PoWs; (4) mass graves near the Water Tower; (6) possible mass graves of the first victims killed by the Nazis in 194; (6) and (7) mass graves of civilians (most likely Jews) in the forest.

<sup>469</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 214 Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.

#### 5.4.1. The mass graves near the Water Tower

According to the reports put together by the Extraordinary Commission, the primary killing site of Slavuta's Jews was identified as the burial site in front of the Water Tower— Object №4 (Plate 5.3.).<sup>470</sup> Notably, former prisoners of the nearby PoW camp recalled that this spot was chosen in order to terrify the PoWs that were witnesses of executions. They also recall that not only Jews were executed by the Water Tower, but also those assisting PoW's, those that were connected to the Communist Party, Soviet activists, and those that assisted or were themselves members of the partisan movement.<sup>471</sup> According to some eyewitness testimonies, the PoWs were forced to dig pits before execution and later backfilled those graves after executions.<sup>472</sup> This site was located at the edge of the city in a difficult-to-access place close to the PoW camp (formerly the military base; Chapter 6). This fact is important due to the possibility of mass graves related to Soviet repressions and the Holodomor in Slavuta in this area.

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<sup>470</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#). NB: here and later, all mass grave locations are mentioned with names which were used in the Extraordinary Commission investigations (*Object ...*). This term is meant in a Russian *site* or *facility* in this context.

<sup>471</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op.3/ s. 237, p.175 [Decree regarding forwarding material of investigation in Slavuta to Ukrainian Republican Commission for estimating and investigating German-Fascist Crimes](#).

<sup>472</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 106 [Testimony of D. Milevskii](#).



*Plate 5.3. The general area containing the mass grave near the Water Tower today (Author's own photos. 16/05/2019)*

#### 5.4.4.1. Mass grave locations and descriptions

Based on the Extraordinary Commission report, 11 burial mounds were scattered around a hilly landscape, approximately 100 m from the Water Tower (Fig. 5.5.). Some mounds were relatively high, and others were barely visible above the ground.<sup>473</sup> All mounds were covered by low grass. One of the mounds (burial 7) was half-intact, as one of the sides had a funnel-shaped recess, perhaps the result of artillery shell impact.<sup>474</sup> The surface of the funnel was covered by clay-sand soil (the same type of soil as on the other mounds).<sup>475</sup> It is difficult to understand from the document when this funnel appeared; however, perhaps it was the result of battles before the Nazi occupation or, more likely, battles for the liberation of the city.

<sup>473</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 2. F. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 814, p.149 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>474</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>475</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

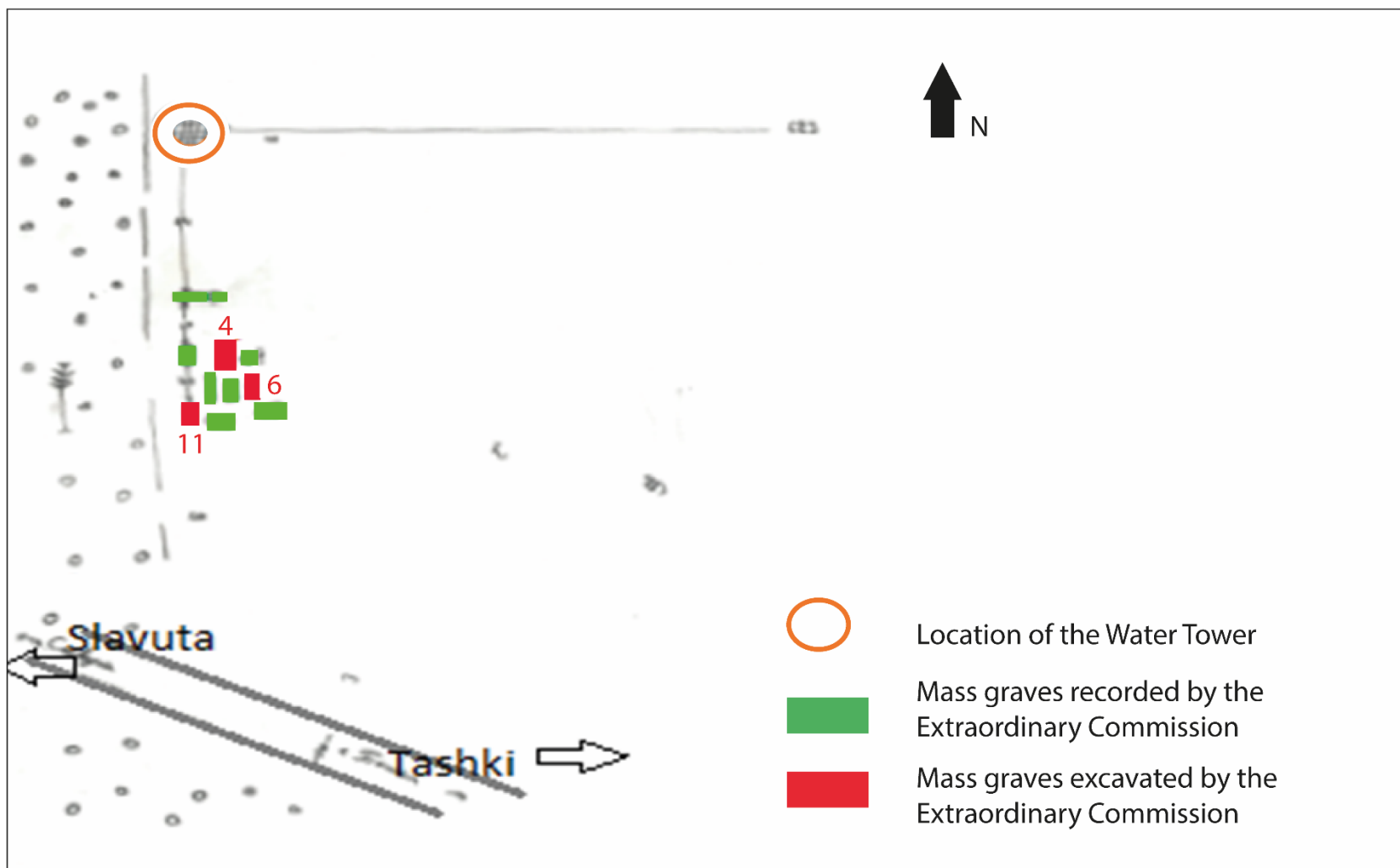


Fig. 5.5. The location of mass graves identified by the Extraordinary Commission on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1944. Original plan YVA 7021-64-1, p. 88

One of the graves was at the bottom of the hill, among the trees. Instead of a mound, it formed a ditch, which made identification of the burial more difficult for the Extraordinary Commission experts. This is possibly due to the decay of the bodies within it. Referring to forensic taphonomy, soils are dynamic environments that constantly change due to activities of flora, fauna and geological processes.<sup>476</sup> The decomposition of human bodies on and within soils strongly influences the landscape, both chemically and physically. The buried body goes through several phases of decomposition: autolysis (self-destruction of cells); putrefaction (rotting of soft tissues); and decay (dead organic matter separates into simpler substances).<sup>477</sup> The signs of each stage can change the burial site surface. For example, during the putrefaction stage, the activity of bacteria releases gaseous compounds, and human body cavities are filled with gases.<sup>478</sup> The result is an increase in the size of a body. In the case of shallow mass graves (where many corpses are buried at the same place and are in the same stage of decomposition), the grave should be extremely visible.<sup>479</sup> In the early stages of decomposition, the reason for soil movement could be explained by air coming out from the body due to compression). Many eyewitnesses of Nazi crimes mentioned that the graves seemed to breathe (soil moved) or the earth was bubbling with blood.<sup>480</sup> The appearance of depression explains at least two factors: (1) grave soils become consolidated and sink after backfilling of a grave in a subsequent period; (2) this process might be enhanced by the decay of soft tissues, e.g. collapse of the abdominal cavity of the buried victim.<sup>481</sup>

Only three out of eleven graves were excavated (4, 6 and 11) by the Extraordinary Commission (the plan of graves 4 and 6 is presented on Fig. 5.6. and the location of excavated graves is

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Junkins, E. and Carter, D. (2017) 'Relationships between Human Remains, Graves and the Depositional Environment', in E. Schotsmans, N. Márquez-Grant, and S. Forbes (Eds) *Taphonomy of Human Remains: Forensic Analysis of the Dead and the Depositional Environment: Forensic Analysis of the Dead and the Depositional Environment*, Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 145-154.

<sup>477</sup> Camplin, R., Evans, D. and Green (2016) 'Soil Fauna and Their Effects on Decomposition Within Coniferous and Deciduous Tree Soil Samples', in H. Kars and L. Van den Eijkel (eds) *Soil in Criminal and Environmental Forensics. Proceedings of the Soil Forensics Special*. Springer Cham, pp. 265-266.

<sup>478</sup> Camplin, R. (2016) pp. 265-266.

<sup>479</sup> Camplin, R (2016) pp. 265-266.

<sup>480</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 3: f. 7021/ op. 60 / s. 285, p. 17 [Testimony of M. Pekelis](#); YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 107 [Testimony of D. Milevskii](#).

<sup>481</sup> Hunter, J. and Cox, M. (2005) pp. 30-31.



presented on Fig. 5.5.). No explanation was given as to why exactly these mass graves were selected. Sapozhnikov recalled in his memoirs that he supervised the excavation of two giant pits into which “were shot and buried all Jewish communities of Slavuta” (perhaps he meant the mass graves near the Water Tower).<sup>482</sup> Upon uncovering, the soil was recorded as a wet clay-sand mixture. Perhaps moisture appeared due to snow melt or rainfall, but the soil is normally dryer clay-sand mixture. According to oral witness testimonies of one Extraordinary Commission member, the excavation of a mass grave was conducted in this way: several trenches were uncovered, and as one was backfilled after the exhumation, members of the Commission moved to the next one. There also was a small distance between the trenches for a walkway.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1963) *Vospominaniya sudebnogo medika*. Kyiv: Zdorov'ya, p. 259.

<sup>483</sup> YIUA, 890-891 U.

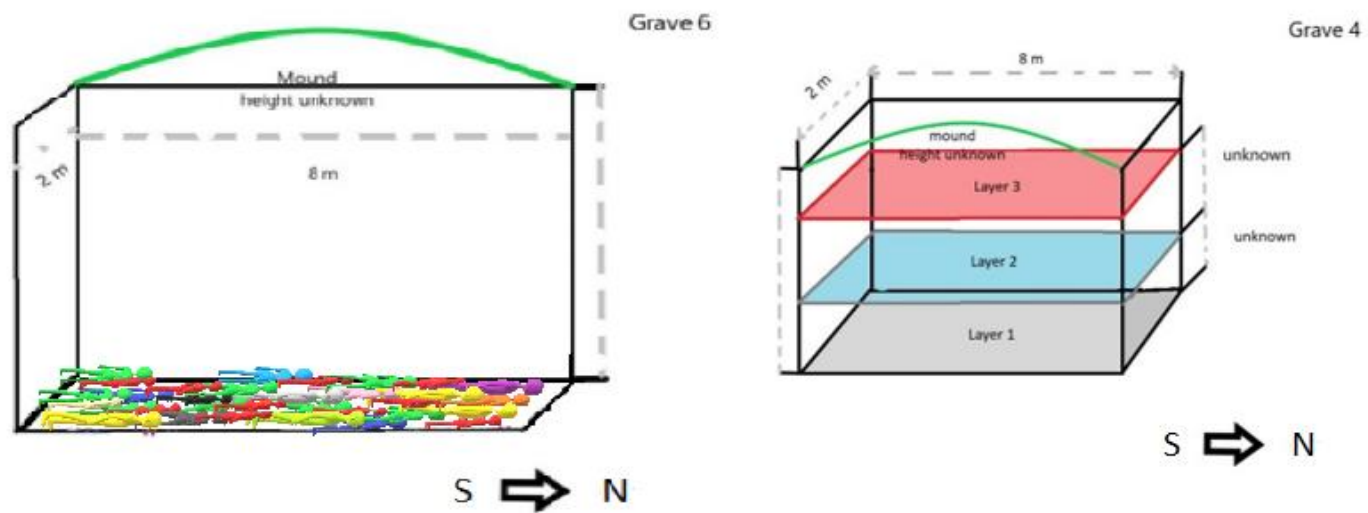


Fig 5.6. Sketches drawn by the authors visualising the excavated graves based on the Extraordinary Commission report.

#### 5.4.4.2. *The topography of human remains*

There were corpses found in all excavated graves, laying compactly next to each other in rows. Grave 4 had three layers of corpses, and graves 6 and 11 had a single layer only.<sup>484</sup> Human remains appeared at a depth of 1 – 1,4 m (grave 4).<sup>485</sup> The multilayering of cadavers was mentioned only in the Final Report of exhumation, but several layers of bodies were not mentioned in the autopsy reports. Another difference between those documents was inconsistent information about the measurements of grave 4. According to the Final report, the size of this grave was 8 x 2 m, but in the autopsy, minutes mentioned that the size was 9 x 5 m.<sup>486</sup> In addition, both measurements contradict a statement of Dominik Milewski (his testimony was based on information received from a Jew who survived a mass execution and local *polizai Piontekh*). He mentioned the measurements of graves as 15-20 m x 5-6 m, with a depth of about 3 m.<sup>487</sup> Possibly, the detached mass graves described in the Extraordinary Commission report were originally part of the same trenches. Currently, it is impossible to explain these inconsistencies in various documents, but it is important to highlight them. In addition, both measurements contradicted the statement of the eyewitness.

During the execution, single-layer burials were probably filled within one day, and the same was probably true for a single layer in a multi-layer grave. Rows of corpses were laid out as follows: torso, oriented towards the short end of the grave (its side), lay on the legs of the corpse lying adjacent (Plate 5.2.).<sup>488</sup> According to Belyi, who witnessed this murder, during the extermination, victims were made to lay in a row at the bottom of pre-dug pits, six in a row, and then they were shot. The next set of six would lay on top of them, and so on.<sup>489</sup> The number of people in a row varied in different testimonies (from three to nine people).<sup>490</sup> There were

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<sup>484</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#).

<sup>485</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 76 [Excavation minutes of graves near Water Tower](#).

<sup>486</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 76 [Excavation minutes of graves near Water Tower](#); Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#); 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 88 [The location of mass graves and the PoW cemeteries, drawn by the members of the Extraordinary Commission on 26th April 1944](#).

<sup>487</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 106 [Survey of the mass grave location near the Water Tower, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1944](#).

<sup>488</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#).

<sup>489</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 238, p.60 [Testimony of N. Belyi](#).

<sup>490</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 7; 38; 48; 55 [Testimonies of N. Belyi, Ya. Gei, V. Zhmuidanovich](#).

several conglomerates of corpses where there were one or several child corpses next to female ones; sometimes, the hands of a female corpse are embracing the body of a child.<sup>491</sup> According to the exhumation minutes, usually one or two cadavers of children of various ages were near female cadavers (at their back or side).<sup>492</sup> Almost all exhumed children's cadavers were measured in length; according to this information, even newborn children were buried there (the smallest length of a skeleton was 53 cm).<sup>493</sup>

The only exception to this layout was the south side of grave 4, where corpses were laid chaotically.<sup>494</sup> The positions of corpses were various there: seated cadavers, and cadavers with lower limbs towards the top of the grave.<sup>495</sup> This position can be interpreted as the likely place of execution for the final group of Jews, who, according to the testimonies, filled up previous graves and were thus executed last.<sup>496</sup> Another account comes from Zhmudovich, who was forced to work as a driver and transfer Jews from the ghetto toward the Water Tower with other workers of a china factory. He saw already prepared pits with one shallow slope (perhaps for easy access to the pit).<sup>497</sup> The chaotic positions of cadavers in one part of the grave could be explained by the particular configuration of the burial site (the existence of a possible slope in the one edge of the mass grave).

An interesting detail appeared in the Exhumation Minutes of mass grave 11. There a female cadaver in a semi-seated position in the corner of the burial site is mentioned. However, no information is given regarding the layout of the rest of the remains.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>492</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 76-77 [Excavation minutes of grave 4 near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>493</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 76 – 90 [Excavation minutes of graves near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>494</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 76 [Excavation minutes of grave 4 near Water Tower](#); Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>495</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 76 [Excavation minutes of grave 4 near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>496</sup> YIUA, 890-891U.

<sup>497</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6.p. 49 [Testimony of V. Zhmuidanovich.](#)

<sup>498</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 86 [Excavation minutes of grave 6 near Water Tower.](#)

#### 5.4.4.3. *Cause and manner of death*

The attention of medico-legal experts was focused mainly on the analysis and interpretation of skeletal traumas. However, the Extraordinary Commission experts ignored any description of soft tissue damage, which could be explained by the lack of methodology and experience in examining such remains in the forensic sciences at the time and/or the extreme decay of the corpses. The important reference to soft tissue condition was the mention of adipocere formation for all cadavers.<sup>499</sup> The adipocere formation could preserve traumas and injuries on human remains, making them recognisable for a long time.<sup>500</sup> Based on that fact, the Extraordinary Commission experts were able to identify positions of gunshot injuries precisely. Table 5.2. provides a description of skeletal traumas identified by the Extraordinary Commission experts, verified by eyewitness testimonies in combination with modern forensic knowledge.

According to Sapozhnikov's (the member of the Extraordinary Commission in Slavuta) memoirs, 1011 cadavers were excavated from all burial sites in Slavuta: a full autopsy was done for 111 (or 112) cadavers, all of which were from the PoW cemetery (Chapter 6); the remaining 900 (or 889) were examined only partially.<sup>501</sup> 184 bodies were exhumed for medical examination total (101 female corpses, 81 children, 2 male) from the mass graves near the Water Tower. According to Sapozhnikov, only visual inspections were conducted for these remains and a particular examination of the respiratory system in order to (1) to record visible bone wounds; (2) to check the appearance of sand fractures in bronchis as evidence of that people were buried alive.<sup>502</sup> No corpses were exhumed from grave 6 due to the advanced stage of decomposition, but 23 corpses were examined in situ.<sup>503</sup> According to Sapozhnikov's testimony, most of the corpses exhumed from the graves were examined in the flat area within the campsite, and only respiratory systems were researched.<sup>504</sup> The primary purpose was to

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<sup>499</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>500</sup> Hamilton, S., Green, M. (2017) 'Gross Post-Mortem Changes in the Human Body', in E. Schotsmans N. Márquez-Grant and S. Forbes (Eds) *Taphonomy of Human Remains: Forensic Analysis of the Dead and the Depositional Environment: Forensic Analysis of the Dead and the Depositional Environment*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, p. 17.

<sup>501</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1963), p.258.

<sup>502</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1963), p. 257.

<sup>503</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 76 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>504</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1963), p. 258.

estimate how many people died due to asphyxia and had the remains of sand in their respiratory system as proof that they were buried alive. The examination of children's remains did not confirm eyewitness testimonies because most of the children's skulls had gunshot wounds or were severely damaged with multi-fragment fractures.<sup>505</sup> However, some skulls did not have any damage e.g. the cadaver of a boy (length of skeleton 72 cm);<sup>506</sup> a female cadaver with remaining braids;<sup>507</sup> and another female with no distinguishing features.<sup>508</sup> Unfortunately, no information was available regarding damage to the rest of the skeletons.

As mentioned in the Conclusion sections of the Exhumation minutes, the majority of examined human remains had bone defects caused by gunshot trauma.<sup>509</sup> Medico-legal experts measured entry/exit wounds and marked their locations, describing traumas resulting from firearms. However, for reasons not disclosed, only skull and neck traumas were recorded in the Exhumation minutes. Based on that fact, it is possible that the cause of death for corpses with no skull trauma might be gunshot trauma in other parts of the body.

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<sup>505</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 79 -82; 83- 85 [Excavation minutes of graves 4 and 6 near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>506</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 84 [Excavation minutes of grave 6 near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>507</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 87 [Excavation minutes of grave 11 near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>508</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 79 [Excavation minutes of grave 4 near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>509</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 79-80; 88; 90 [Excavation minutes of graves 6 and 11 near Water Tower.](#)

#	Types of wounds classified by the Extraordinary Commission experts <sup>510</sup>		Comments	Eyewitness testimony
1	Entrance wounds in the nape bone, exit wounds in the frontal lobe and other parts of the face of the skeleton, outer eye socket, skull bones, and upper jaw. Sometimes entrance wounds were located in the nape hole, causing damage to the edges.	All three groups of wounds confirmed that individuals were killed by shooting in the back of the head. Various entrance and exit wounds demonstrated that the position of a victim at the moment of death could be slightly different, and the person who was pulling a trigger not always took aim in the nape (possibly due to alcohol, prevention of resistance or a fuss).	The description clearly stated that the bullet entrance and exit wounds were identified. This is sometimes quite complicated, especially on skeletonised remains, as well as the general determination of the origin of blunt force, sharp force, and projectile trauma. <sup>511</sup> Due to the fact that remains were already in a state of extreme decay, it is reasonable to assume that the shape and size of the wounds were the signs used to determine where originally the entrance was and where the exit wounds were. Important to note, that sometimes the trajectory of a bullet in the body is not straight but ricochets off a bone or other obstacle. <sup>512</sup> The size is usually smaller and similar to the shape of the bullet (if it enters the body at a right angle or close to it) at the entrance	
2	Some cases of entrance wounds in the first neck vertebrae and exit wounds as in previous cases or lobe-temple and temple-vertex areas of the head.			

<sup>510</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, pp. 77-79 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#).

<sup>511</sup> Hunter, J. and Cox, M. (2005).

<sup>512</sup> Gunn, A. (2009) *Essential Forensic biology*: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 194

3	A small number of skulls with the exact location of entrance wounds as the first and second group and exit wounds in lobe-temple and temple-vertex areas of the head		wound. The exit wound is often larger and has more bone tissue damage. In addition, bone tissue is turned in the direction of the movement of the bullet. The shape of the exit wound might vary. <sup>513</sup> Sometimes exit wound appears "shored" in cases when the bullet met some impediment when leaving the body (the edge of a wound is abraded against overlapping objects). <sup>514</sup> It makes it challenging to identify where entrance and exit wounds are.	
4	Some skulls with entrance wounds on one side of the skull and exit wounds on the other side. In such cases, there is always multiple shard damage to the skull present.	This fact means that some individuals were shot in temporals. This could probably be explained by the fact that the victims changed their position or attempted to resist.	A bullet with high velocity imparts more energy and is more likely to pass through the victim's body. In addition, a bullet with high velocity has far more kinetic energy. It caused the formation of damage to tissues (i.e., bleeding around or bone damage) more comprehensive than the bullet's diameter. The velocity of a bullet could cause a small object with a small mass and penetrating the	

<sup>513</sup> Avdeev, M. (50) pp.116-118; Christensen, A., Passalacqua, N. and Bartelnink, E. (2014) *Forensic anthropology Current methods and Practice* . Academic Press, p. 356; Byers, S. (2015). *Introduction to forensic anthropology*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 249-261; Smith, O., Pope, E. and Symes, S. (2015) 'Look Until You See: Identification of Trauma in Skeletal Material', in D. Steadman (ed.). *Hard Evidence. Case Studies in Forensic Anthropology*. Routledge, p.139.

<sup>514</sup> Gunn, A. (2009), p. 195.



			surface to result in severe wounds. The scale of harm also depends on the tense of the tissue: i.e., muscle tissue is more elastic and protected to some extent, in contrast with brain tissue which may burst due to lack of elasticity. <sup>515</sup>	
5	Some skulls, primarily children, suffered severe damage with multi-fragmented fractures and separated bone fragments.		The consequences of gasses caused to the shot from the contact (tight contact) range could be dramatic. For example, if these are discharged into the skull, it can result in the whole skull literally exploding due to its rigid structure. <sup>516</sup> Additionally, it could be a result of blunt or sharp trauma. Information provided by the Extraordinary Commission report is not enough to analyse the nature of this damage.	
6	Some skulls had no damage.		Current forensic research argues that the bullet does not always penetrate the bone. <sup>517</sup> Sometimes gunshot wounds could appear as bone fractures or depression, invisible before autopsy. A complete external and internal examination is	An eyewitness confirmed that some children were not shot but buried alive (he heard cries). <sup>518</sup> Another witness stated that there

<sup>515</sup> Spatola, B. (2015) 'Atypical gunshot and blunt force *injuries*: wounds along the biomechanical continuum', in N. Passalacqua, V & C. Rainwater (Eds.) *Skeletal trauma analysis: case studies in context*. Wiley & Sons, p. 11.; Gunn, A. (2009), p. 199.

<sup>516</sup> Gunn, A. (2009), p. 196.

<sup>517</sup> Spatola, B. (2015) pp. 14-15.

<sup>518</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.5, p. 43 *Testimonies of V. Zhmuidanovich*.

			<p>required for this reason. The absence of damage on remains makes it possible to suggest that they were buried alive (and died due to asphyxia). It is possible that these types of executions occurred, but that a more detailed analysis of the skeletal remains would be needed to confirm if they were buried alive or if they sustained other types of gunshot injuries.</p>	<p>was soil movement after the shootings, indicating that some people were buried alive.<sup>519</sup> However, it could relate to the cadaver's decomposition process. In addition, confirmation of the practice of burying people alive was found during the investigation of other sites in Slavuta.<sup>520</sup></p>
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*Table. 5.2. The injuries of cadavers described by the Extraordinary Commission experts. Created by the author based on information from the Extraordinary Commission records.*

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<sup>519</sup> YIUA, 890-891U

<sup>520</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1963), pp. 257-258.

This level of variety in gunshot patterns validates the witness testimonies that stated that people were shot in various ways.<sup>521</sup> In addition, it is mentioned that several entry wounds were present on some skulls.<sup>522</sup> Bone tissue is a viscoelastic material (it can behave like a brittle or ductile material). Therefore, depending on the object's speed that causes the injury (a bullet in this case), the more characteristics there are of brittle material.<sup>523</sup> The bone injuries of the skull described above, in addition to the presence of several wounds in one individual, allow for the possibility that automatic weapons were used.

However, it is not at all clear whether bullets were found in bodies and why there is no information about them in the report. The report summarises the dimensions of wounds as 0.7 - 0.8 cm (perhaps, these dimensions possibly relate to the entrance wound dimensions only).<sup>524</sup> Average dimensions of wounds for corpses from mass grave 11 were slightly different, 1 – 1.5 cm.<sup>525</sup> Extraordinary Commission experts did not provide any explanation of this difference. This hypothesis also was provided in the Conclusion section of the Exhumation minutes for the mass grave 4.<sup>526</sup> Unfortunately, it is impossible to reconstruct the bullet trajectory and the distance from which shots were fired due to the lack of a more detailed description of individual skulls. For some reasons, which are impossible to determine now, the representatives of the Extraordinary Commission did not mention finding any bullet casings in the graves. Additionally, the report contains no information on the location of the shooters. However, it was a mandatory requirement to collect this information while inspecting the crime scene even before WWII.<sup>527</sup> Only one mention of some metal object (possible bullet) in the right knee joint of the female cadaver (length of the skeleton 114 cm) is available in the Exhumation minutes.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> YIUA, 890-891U.

<sup>522</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 77 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>523</sup> Langley, N. (2017) *Forensic Anthropology, 2nd Ed.*, Taylor & Francis.

<sup>524</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 77 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>525</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 89-90 [Excavation minutes of grave 9 near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>526</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 82 [Excavation minutes of grave 6 near Water Tower..](#)

<sup>527</sup> Vyshynskii, A. (ed.) (1935) pp. 75 – 84.

<sup>528</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 81 [Excavation minutes of grave 6 near Water Tower..](#)

The Extraordinary Commission experts did estimate sex for almost for all cadavers from mass graves 4 and 6, whilst age estimation was made very approximately (for example, "adult man", "young woman", and "teenager"). In some cases, the remains of hair were described precisely, including hairstyle (for example, braids), length (in cm), and colour (especially grey hair or partly grey hair). The description of children's corpses almost always consisted of the length of skeletons, perhaps for age estimation.<sup>529</sup> Unfortunately, it seems no attempt was made to identify victims for those burial sites. Nevertheless, two adult cadavers from mass graves 4 and 11 had signs of dwarfism, information that might be useful for attempts of victim identification in the future should further details about the victims become available (female remains: length of skeleton 130 cm and the male remains: length of skeleton 115 cm).<sup>530</sup>

#### *5.4.4.4. Estimating the time since death*

Based on eyewitness testimonies and the Extraordinary Commission report, it seems that most executions of Jews occurred from the spring of 1942, probably until the liberation of Slavuta in January 1944 (Section 5.3.1.).<sup>531</sup> It is impossible to identify the accurate date of the beginning of the mass shootings here. However, evidence provided in the reports can give some indication.

Firstly, existing low grass on the mounds mentioned in the Extraordinary Commission report suggests that the burials were made not later than summer 1943.<sup>532</sup> The evidence for this is the weather report, which states that sub-zero temperatures in this part of Ukraine lasted until mid -April, thus inhibiting vegetation growth.<sup>533</sup> Secondly, from the description of the level of decomposition of human remains in the Exhumation Minutes, it can be concluded that victims in mass grave 6 were killed earlier than victims from mass graves 4 and 11. Specifically, the human remains in mass grave 6 were found almost completely skeletonised, and bones could

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<sup>529</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 76 – 90 [Excavation minutes of graves 4, 6 and 11 near Water Tower..](#)

<sup>530</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 78 and 87. [Excavation minutes of graves 4 and 6 near Water Tower.](#)

<sup>531</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s. 5 [Testimonies](#); YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6 [Testimonies](#).

<sup>532</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885. p. 78 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>533</sup> [Arkhiv pogody](#) (1944).

be easily detached.<sup>534</sup> Disarticulation or disintegration of connective tissue between joints are signs of the final stage of putrefaction.<sup>535</sup> The advanced level of decay of human remains was also confirmed by traces of viscous black liquid (perhaps, a final stage of soft tissue fermentation).<sup>536</sup> In contrast with the almost skeletonised remains in grave 6, cadavers in mass graves 4 and 11 were better preserved. According to the Exhumation Minutes, many corpses were found with hair, and some of them had good-preserved elements of clothing (e.g., a calico headscarf,<sup>537</sup> a headscarf,<sup>538</sup> a vest<sup>539</sup>). Additionally, the state of decomposition (decay of connecting tissues, almost completed skeletonization) of cadavers from mass grave 6 did match precisely with the state of decomposition of human remains buried near barracks 5 and 6 in the PoW camp and was recognised by eyewitnesses as the earliest PoW camp cemetery (more information provided in Chapter 6).<sup>540</sup> This fact confirmed information of eyewitnesses regarding the use of the site for several mass executions at various times during the occupation of Slavuta by the Nazis.

A more accurate estimate of time since death could now potentially be made with the emergence of modern forensic methods. Under the right conditions, cutting-edge methods (luminol test, degradation analysis, thermos-gravimetric analysis, analysis of residuals remaining in bone and its bacterial colonisation, analysis of weathering impact on a bone) could allow more precise estimations of post-mortem intervals, even for skeletonised remains.<sup>541</sup> These methods were however unavailable during and after WWII and forensic experts had to rely on analysis of adipocere. As mentioned by Sapozhnikov in his 1940 book for forensic medics and criminalists, the accuracy of estimating the time since death decreases over time and is affected by various characteristics (i.e., temperature, humidity, environment,

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<sup>534</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 88-90 [Excavation minutes of grave 6 near Water Tower](#).

<sup>535</sup> Wilson-Taylor, R. (2013) 'Time since Death Estimation and Bone Weathering; The Postmortem Interval', in N. Langley, and M.-T. Tersigni-Tarrant *Forensic Anthropology. An Introduction*. CRC Press, p. 343.

<sup>536</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p.88 [Excavation minutes of grave 6 near Water Tower](#).

<sup>537</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p.78 [Excavation minutes of grave 4 near Water Tower](#).

<sup>538</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp.77; 79 [Excavation minutes of grave 4 near Water Tower](#).

<sup>539</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p..81 [Excavation minutes of grave 4 near Water Tower](#).

<sup>540</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6 [Testimonies](#).

<sup>541</sup> Cameron, A. and Oxenham, M. (2020) 'The postmortem interval and skeletal remains', in J. Hayman and M. Oxenham (Eds.) *Estimations of the Time since Death. Current Research and Future Trends*. Academic Press, pp. 141-167.

etc).<sup>542</sup> Even now, adequate research requires analysis of the broader depositional context.<sup>543</sup> According to the Extraordinary Commission report, adipocere was present on all the corpses.<sup>544</sup> The soil on this site (mixture of sand and clay) mentioned in their report and confirmed during site visits in 2018 and 2020 and fieldwork in 2019 is a perfect environment for adipocere formation. This transformation allows soft tissues to be preserved for a long time.<sup>545</sup> The process of saponification (transformation of fatty tissues to adipocere) can start from three weeks to two months since burial.<sup>546</sup> Sapozhnikov also argued that the body could transform to adipocere within 2-6 months of death.<sup>547</sup> However, adipocere formation is not a solid indicator for the estimation of time since death due to highly variable conditions influencing the speed of transformation of the remains.<sup>548</sup> The current level of knowledge in forensic taphonomy recognises two types of adipocere: a hard and crumbly variant which produced quicker and a soft paste-like variant which produced slower.<sup>549</sup> If the Extraordinary Commission experts had added an accurate description of adipocere, this information could have assisted in estimating the time since death more precisely. This information could have facilitated the important discussion on whether these graves were related to the Holocaust or other mass violence mentioned in the previous sections.

#### 5.4.4.5. Correlation with eyewitness testimonies

Mostly the results of mass grave excavations were confirmed by eyewitnesses.<sup>550</sup> For example, according to the Extraordinary Commission report, there was no clothing on the corpses, only

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<sup>542</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940) p. 25.

<sup>543</sup> Schotsmans, E., Van de Voorde, W. and Forbes Sh. (2020) 'TSD estimation in the advanced stages of decomposition', in J. Hayman, and M. Oxenham (Eds.) *Estimations of the Time since Death. Current Research and Future Trends*. Academic Press, p.81

<sup>544</sup> NB: the adipocere formation occurs with the hydrolysis and hydrogenation of adipose fat. Usually, this process happens with the body in a damp anaerobic environment: Schotsmans, E., Van de Voorde, W. and Forbes Sh. (2020) p. 88.

<sup>545</sup> Schotsmans, E., Van de Voorde, W. and Forbes Sh. (2020) p. 89.

<sup>546</sup> Christensen, A., Passalacqua, N. and Bartelnink, E. (2014) p. 124.

<sup>547</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1940) p. 25

<sup>548</sup> Gilbert, F., Oxenham, M. (2020)' Estimation of the TSD in an Aquatic Environment', in J. Hayman, and M. Oxenham (Eds.) *Estimations of the Time since Death. Current Research and Future Trends*. Academic Press, p. 189.

<sup>549</sup> Wilson-Taylor, R. (2013) p. 342.

<sup>550</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 2. F. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 814, p.149 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 27 April 1944](#); TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 238, p. 60 [Interrogation of N. Belyi](#).

some had remains of underwear.<sup>551</sup> Some female heads were covered with headscarves.<sup>552</sup> The undressing of the victims was also validated by the testimony of a witness recruited by Nazis to transfer the possessions of Jews from the ghetto to some other base. He saw trucks filled with victims' clothing returning from the execution sites.<sup>553</sup> Possibly these were the same trucks that, according to the witness, were used to transport women and children to the site of execution; men had to walk.<sup>554</sup> But not all witnesses agreed that victims were undressed, and the evidence shows that some of them indeed had some clothing on.<sup>555</sup> It is possible that witnesses that were observing this from afar (up to 500 m, in a forest behind the barracks <sup>556</sup> (see Plate 5.3.) did not see some of the details or just forgot them.<sup>557</sup>

The presence of numerous graves, and the fact that the majority of victims were women and children, in combination with eyewitness statements, suggests that several extermination actions occurred in the same area in 1942 and 1943.

#### 5.4.4.6. Number of victims

The issue with Jewish victim numbers in Slavuta is that the Soviet Extraordinary Commission investigation results are questionable. According to traditional Soviet data, up to 13,000 Jews were exterminated in Slavuta during the Nazi occupation.<sup>558</sup> The estimation of killed people was dramatically different to the total Jewish population in Slavuta and the surroundings mentioned in sections 5.2 and 5.3.1. Historians Umanski and Kruglov also argued that the number of victims is overestimated.<sup>559</sup> The analysis of the exhumation procedures generated an understanding of how the number of victims was derived.

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<sup>551</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 79 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>552</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 79 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>553</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 2. F. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 814, p. 153 [Testimony of S. Fediuk.](#)

<sup>554</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 2. F. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 814, p. 155 [Testimony of M. Kavunets.](#)

<sup>555</sup> YIUA, 890-891U.

<sup>556</sup> YIUA, 890-891U.

<sup>557</sup> Thompson, P. (1972) 'Problems of Method in Oral History', *Oral History*, 1(4), pp. 6-7; Kirby, R. (2008). Phenomenology and the Problems of Oral History. *The Oral History Review*, 35(1), p. 25; Desbois, P. (2013) p. 93.

<sup>558</sup> *Istoriia mist i sil* (1971) p. 467; USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 4. F. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 814, p. 148 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 27th April 1944.](#); USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 2: f. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 903 [Materials regarding the investigations in Slavuta conducted by the Extraordinary Commission.](#)

<sup>559</sup> Kruglov, A., Umanskiy, A. and Shchupak, I.(2016) p. 539.

The number of corpses was as follows – grave 4 had at least 350-360 individuals, grave 6 – up to 200, grave 11 – up to 150-180. There were 107 corpses exhumed from grave 4, and 77 from grave 11. The Extraordinary Commission members probably used the counting methodology described in Chapter 4. Therefore, these figures should be considered approximate (up to remains 924 individuals). Medico-legal expertise in combination with eyewitness testimonies confirmed the existence of burial sites which could be identified as graves of the local Jewish community during the occupation. However, the number of victims was significantly overestimated. Based on the pre-war census, the existence of other killing sites and mass graves the realistic death toll for this site would be estimated between 800 (e.g. the number of cadavers exhumed by the Extraordinary Commission) and 6,200 (the total Jewish population of Slavuta and its surroundings before the Nazi-Soviet War and minus cadavers which were exhumed at other sites). The most realistic figures for the mass graves near the Water Tower should be in the region of about 2,000-3,000 individuals.<sup>560</sup> Providing of realistic numbers of the dead for this location is crucial for two reasons: (1) the prevention of speculation and the use of overcalculated figures by Holocaust deniers seeking to use them as evidence of the faux nature of the Holocaust and (2) to enable more emphasis to be placed on seeing and researching personal tragedies rather than on a contest over which sites had the biggest mass graves or the largest number of victims.

Despite the aforementioned ambiguity, the mass graves of other genocide and repressions (described in Section 5.2.1) should exist in Slavuta. However, only a minor possibility exists that the mass graves near the Water Tower relate to these events because: (1) as described in Section 2.2.1, it was a common practice of Nazis to exploit the exhumation of the remains of

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<sup>560</sup> **Biographical note:** Unfortunately, members of the Extraordinary Commission did not include any information regarding the victim's identities in their report. But at least one person buried in this location could be identified with the assistance of testimonies collected during the investigation in 1944. It is being said about wife of A. Shatalov (her name is unknown at the time of writing; for this reason, only her husband's last name with a female ending would be used). Shatalova was a Jew. She and her son (he was a child in a mixed marriage) had been imprisoned with other local Jews in the Slavuta ghetto. Shatalov, who worked in the PoW camp, tried to liberate his family, but his attempts failed. However, he managed to organise an escape only for his son just before the final liquidation of the ghetto. His wife, with other ghetto inmates, had been shot near the Water Tower on Friday, 26th June 1942. Before death, she was forced to undress and lie down on the bottom of the grave with 3-5 people. YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 176 Testimony of A. Shatalov.



victims of the Soviet terror for ideological purposes. According to eyewitness testimonies and the Extraordinary Commission report, mass graves near the Water Tower were clearly visible and recognisable. Therefore, if they did not commit the crimes, the Nazis would not have missed the opportunity to investigate this location, (2) data from the forensic investigations matched eyewitness testimonies (collected at different times, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union), (3) the majority of victims were women and children, which is consistent with the primary categories of the Holocaust victims (men usually were drafted into the Armed Forces or evacuated with various organisations; in addition, usually young men were exterminated in the first instance). Therefore, the search for the locations of the graves pertaining to the Holodomor and Stalinist repressions is still required in Slavuta.

It is not clear what happened with the discovered mass graves after the Extraordinary Commission left. It seems the monument dedicated to the Holocaust victims in this location was erected in the late 1980s or early 1990s. It appears that this area was abandoned after the liberation of Slavuta in 1944. In this case, a helpful instrument of the "archaeological gaze" can play an indispensable role. According to Sendyka's theory of non-sites of memory, a researcher should look comparatively at what remains at sites and what has been there previously.<sup>561</sup> The landscape should be analysed as a crime scene, and in light of this, the Extraordinary Commission records allow events and environments from more than 75 years ago to be examined.

## **5.5. The results of archaeological fieldwork in 2019**

### 5.5.1. Aims, methodology and sites conditions

The verification of the Extraordinary Commission results is one of the primary tasks of this research project. Therefore, the decision was made to determine the accurate location of mass graves mentioned in the previous section (Fig. 5.7, Object 4). In addition, confirmation of exact burial sites would allow the locations of other objects such as mass graves of the PoW camp

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<sup>561</sup> Janus, A., Sendyka, R. (2021) Depth of the field. Bystanders' art, forensic art practice and non-sites of memory. *Heritage, Memory and Conflict*. 1, pp. 73-83.

inmates (see chapter 6) mentioned in the Extraordinary Commission plan to be identified. For this purpose, a forensic archaeological survey was undertaken in Slavuta in May 2019.



Fig. 5.7. The location of mass graves and the PoW cemeteries, drawn by the members of the Extraordinary Commission on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1944 (Object 2 and Object 3 – mass graves of PoWs identified by the Extraordinary Commission members. Object 4 – mass graves near the Water Tower.

The survey location was identified by desk-based assessment and by comparing historical maps and modern aerial images to define a target area for field-based investigation (the procedure was described in chapter 3). In addition, the chosen site is in an area that matches the coordinates mentioned in both the Extraordinary Commission report and in eyewitness testimonies.<sup>562</sup> The main orientation points - the Water Tower, former sand quarry and the monument dedicated to Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Slavuta - were first identified (Fig. 5.8.).



*Plate.5.4. Mounds located on the slope close to the Water Tower (15/08/2020)*

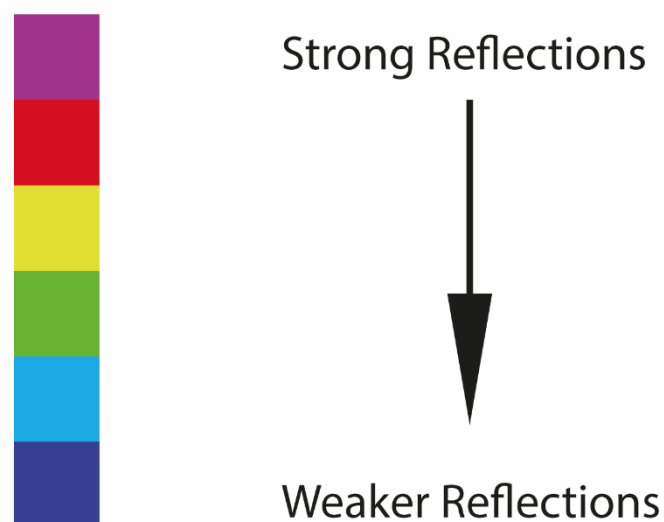
Many different methodological approaches for non-intrusive forensic investigations exist when attempting to identify, categorise and map buried remains. After consideration, the methods chosen for these field investigations were the Forensic Walkover Survey, Ground

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YVA 7021-64-1, p. 88) **The location of mass graves and the PoW cemeteries, drawn by the members of the Extraordinary Commission on 26th April 1944.**<sup>562</sup> <sup>562</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885 **Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944**, YIUA 890-891U; USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 2. F. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 814, p.155 **Testimony of M. Kavunets**; *Slavuta* in *The Untold stories* (web page) Available at: [https://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/chgkSovietReports.asp?cid=798&site\\_id=1084](https://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/chgkSovietReports.asp?cid=798&site_id=1084) // (Accessed 20 August 2019)

Penetrating Radar (GPR), and Global Positioning System Survey (the details of which are included in Chapter 3).

The GPR survey of this site aimed to confirm the presence of a mass grave or graves near the Water Tower and to characterise the location, nature, and dimensions of the features. The dimensions of the grid were 25m x 20m, and the traverse interval between survey lines was 0.5 m. The survey was conducted using a GSSI SIR – 3000 with 400 MHz antenna. Due to the presence of a prominent depression, data could not be collected in the southeastern corner of the survey grid. Accounting for the section which could not be surveyed, the total area covered by the GPR grid was 500 sq. m. Survey lines were undertaken from north to south.



*Fig. 5.8. The colour interpretation of the radio spectrum applied for the survey on grid 2b.*

Gain is the artificial addition of a signal in order to counteract the natural effects of attenuation. As a radar scan travels into the ground, some of the scans is reflected, some of it is absorbed, and some of it keep travelling down. As the scan gets deeper, it becomes weaker. (Fig. 5.8.) For this survey, the number of gain points was chosen as 4. For a survey on this location, the dielectric constant of a material, which reflects the velocity that radar energy moves through a material, was set as 8. This value corresponds to wet clay (See Fig. 5.9.).

## Appendix D: Dielectric Values For Common Materials

Material	Dielectric	Velocity (mm/ns)
Air	1	300
Water (fresh)	81	33
Water (sea)	81	33
Polar snow	1.4 – 3	194 - 252
Polar ice	3 - 3.15	168
Temperate ice	3.2	167
Pure ice	3.2	167
Freshwater lake ice	4	150
Sea ice	2.5 – 8	78 – 157
Permafrost	1 – 8	106 – 300
Coastal sand (dry)	10	95
Sand (dry)	3 – 6	120 - 170
Sand (wet)	25 – 30	55 – 60
Silt (wet)	10	95
Clay (wet)	8 – 15	86 – 110
Clay soil (dry)	3	173
Marsh	12	86
Agricultural land	15	77
Pastoral land	13	83
“Average soil”	16	75
Granite	5 – 8	106 – 120
Limestone	7 – 9	100 – 113
Dolomite	6.8 – 8	106 – 115
Basalt (wet)	8	106
Shale (wet)	7	113
Sandstone (wet)	6	112
Coal	4 – 5	134 – 150
Quartz	4.3	145
Concrete	5 – 8	55 – 120
Asphalt	3 – 5	134 – 173
PVC	3	173

\*\*Meter to English conversion factor: 2.54 cm in 1 inch.

\*\* Table of Dielectric values adapted from:

Reynolds, John M.  
1997 *An Introduction to Applied and Environmental Geophysics*, John Wiley & Sons, New York.

*Fig. 5. 9. Dielectric values for common materials for GSSI 3000 antenna.*

Due to the ground conditions in some parts of the grid, e.g., obstructive vegetation, a raised slope area on the southern side of the grid and mounds in the central part of the surveyed area, the value of the results in some areas was limited.

The slopes and the heights of mounds made the use of the GPR survey very challenging in this area due to the fact that radio waves travel into the ground perpendicular to the surface (Plate 5.5).<sup>563</sup> This means that all results appeared as a flat surface right under the antenna. The appearance of broken terrain could lead to serious position errors of features beneath the surface. Fig 5.10. demonstrated the possible changes of GPR data on the curve surface. In other words, the GPR survey of the hilly area is not ideal, but it can derive some

<sup>563</sup> Geophysical Survey System Inc (2017) *GSSI-SIR 3000 Manual*, p. 60.

results: e.g. existence of an anomaly beneath the surface, but it is extremely difficult to interpret this because dimensions, shapes, depth, etc., might change dramatically.



Plate. 5.5. The motortrack (marked red)

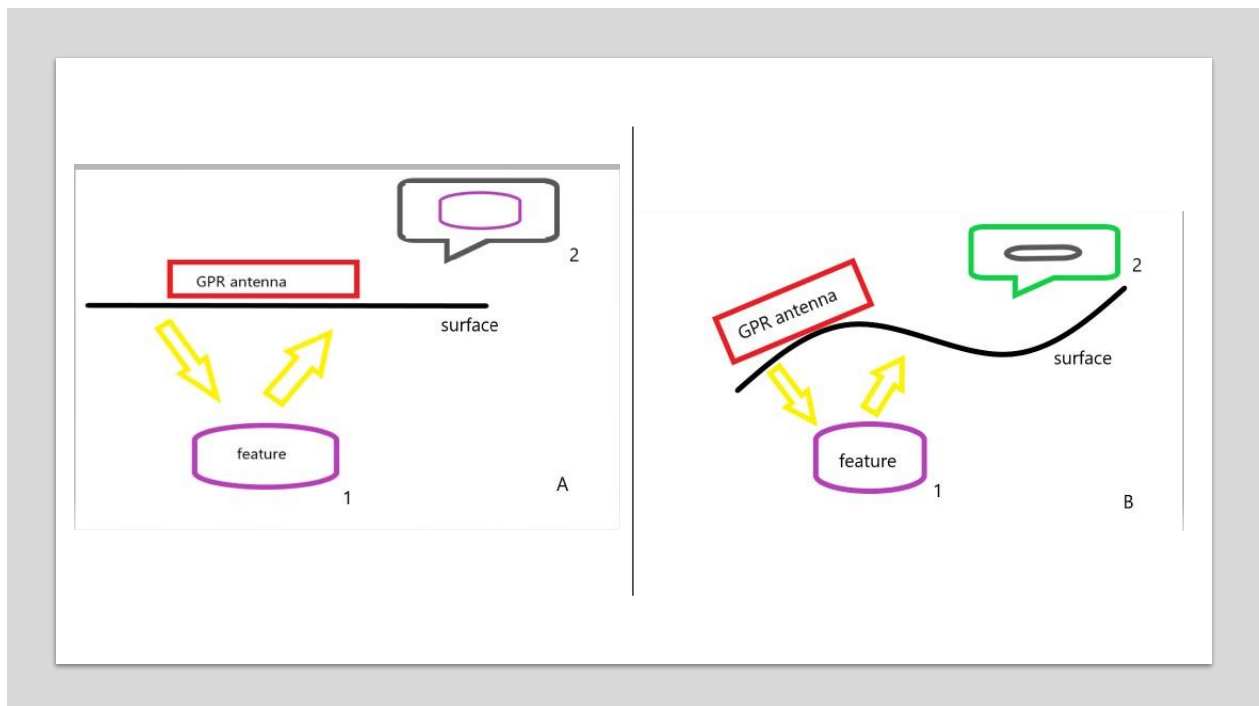


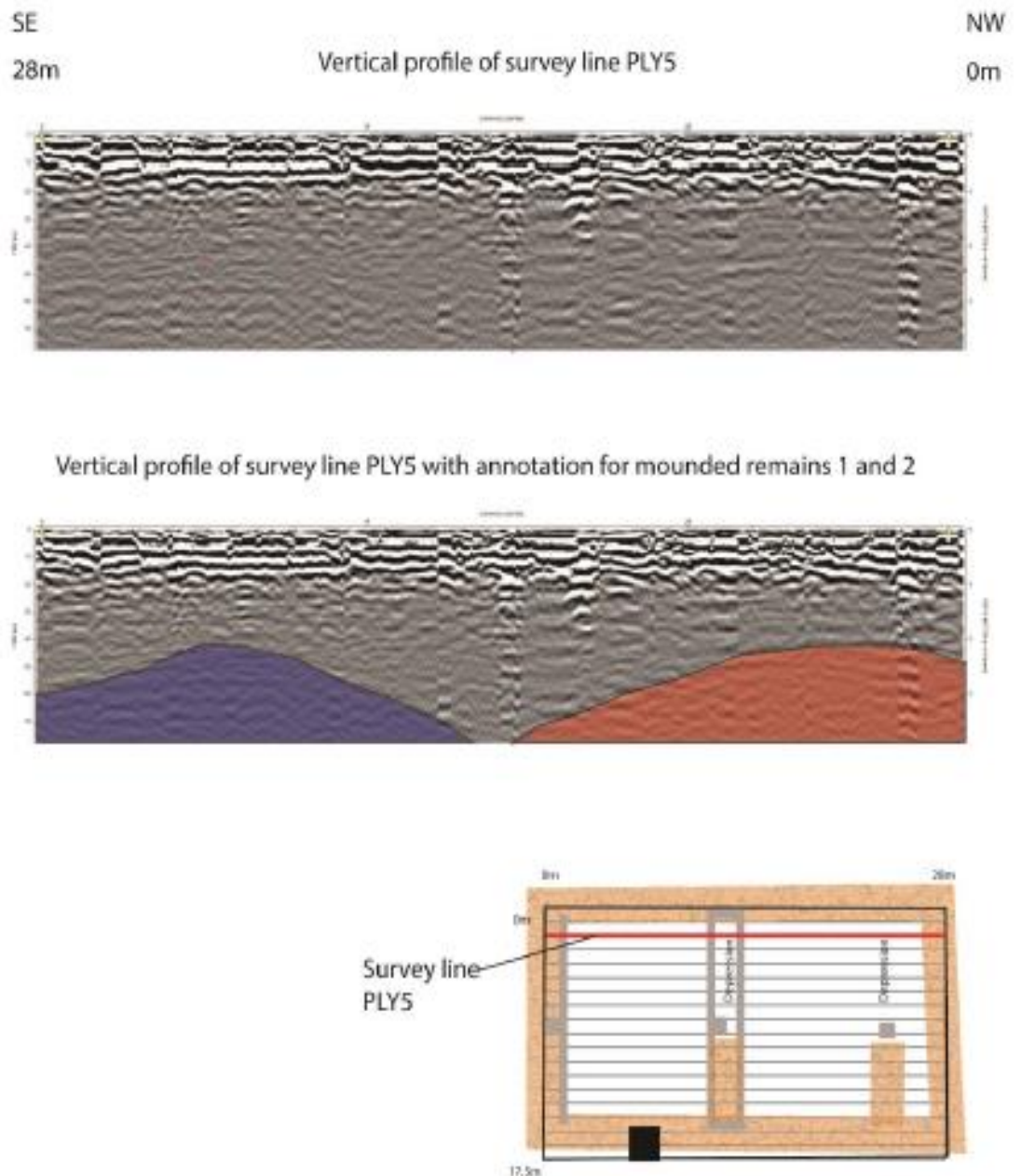
Fig. 5.10. The possible position and proportion of feature during the scanning of flat area (A) and curve area (B): radio waves (yellow arrows); original feature beneath the surface (1); original feature on the 2D profile (2).

However, sometimes the employment of the GPR technique might be effective in some hilly areas, as presented in Fig. 5.11. This image demonstrated the section profile results of the burial site in Plyskiv (Ukraine) surveyed in 2016. The vertical profile of line PLY5 demonstrated the existence of two buried mounds consisting of human remains there.<sup>564</sup> This approach was selected for the investigation in Slavuta because it showed effectiveness on the other sites.

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<sup>564</sup> The Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University and EMC Radar Consulting, (2016) *A programme of non—invasive forensic investigation of possible mass graves sites in the Vinnitsia region, Ukraine*, p. 25.





*Fig. 5.11. Vertical profile data from GPR survey line PLY5 (top), repeated with annotation for buried mounds 1 and 2 (middle) and the site location of PLY5 (bottom) from Plyskiv, Ukraine (courtesy of the Centre of Archaeology) The CoA, (2016) p. 21.*

### 5.5.2. Results of walkover survey

First, a walkover survey was undertaken, during which it was observed that there were 13 mounds located in the area identified during the desk-based assessment, all covered with thick vegetation (grass, bushes and saplings), which could be an indication of some sort of

organic material beneath the surface, including burials.<sup>565</sup> 11 were found on a sloped area and two on a flat surface.

These mounds were recorded and marked on Google Earth imagery based on the number of peaks (see Fig. 5.12. and Plate 5.6.). It should be noted that some peaks shared a base with others; hence the number of above-ground features may, in reality, exceed the number of subterranean ones. Significantly, in the report of the Extraordinary Commission, 11 mass graves were identified. However, even though the mounds discovered during the survey appeared to be located approximately in the same area as those mapped by the Extraordinary Commission, and despite the coincidence of their number (counting the number of mound bases, not peaks), these are unlikely to be the same features that the Soviet experts mentioned.



*Fig.5.12. Location of grid 2b (blue square) and topographical features collected by Leica Zeno with mounds (red dots); debris pit (black dots); vegetation changes (green dots).*

<sup>565</sup> Hochrein, M. (2002) p. 58; Dupras et al. (2006) pp. 38-39; Hunter, J. and Cox, M. (2005) p. 30-32.

This conclusion was first reached by comparing the sizes of mass graves given in the report of the Extraordinary Commission with those taken during the survey (see Table 5.3).<sup>566</sup> This revealed that the mounds mapped during the recent survey were significantly smaller than those located by the Extraordinary Commission. The biggest one was about 3 x 3 m (see Plate. 5.6.), making it smaller than any of those identified in 1945. In addition, according to the Extraordinary Commission report and eyewitness testimony, the Nazi victims were buried in trenches. This fact is confirmed by the descriptions of the mounds shown in Table 5.3. The mounds found during the survey in 2019 were round or irregular square in shape. It should be pointed out, however that the mounds are reducing in size as time passes. This could be due to a number of factors, including both anthropogenic and natural processes. It is also important to remember that any graves present have already been disturbed. Hence, these mounds could relate to the exhumation process, e.g., they could be spoiled heaps from the excavations and therefore, the actual graves could be located nearby. Alternatively, they could be the result of construction works for the memorial nearby. There are the various forms of post-war disturbance that has happened at the site: for example, this area is still used for illegal sand mining for domestic purpose (prominent depressions in the south-eastern and north-eastern corners of the grid), as a motortrack, and as a dump.

1	4 x 2.5 m
2	8 x 2.5 m
3	5 x 2 m
4	8 x 2.5 m (9 x 5 according to exhumation minutes <sup>567</sup> )
5	5 x 8.5 m
6	8 x 2 m
7	9 x 2 m
8	8 x 2 m
9	9 x 2 m
10	8 x 2 m
11	5 x 2 m

*Table 5.3. Mounds measurements described in the Extraordinary Commission report.*

<sup>566</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p 79 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#) .

<sup>567</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 76 [Minutes of excavation of the graves near the Water tower.](#)



*Plate. 5.6. Condition of GPR investigation area with several grass-covered mounds, May 2019.*

### 5.5.3. Results of GPR survey

Due to challenges that appeared with the extreme topography of the surveyed area, it is worth presenting GPR data results for area, where mounds are located, and flat areas separately.

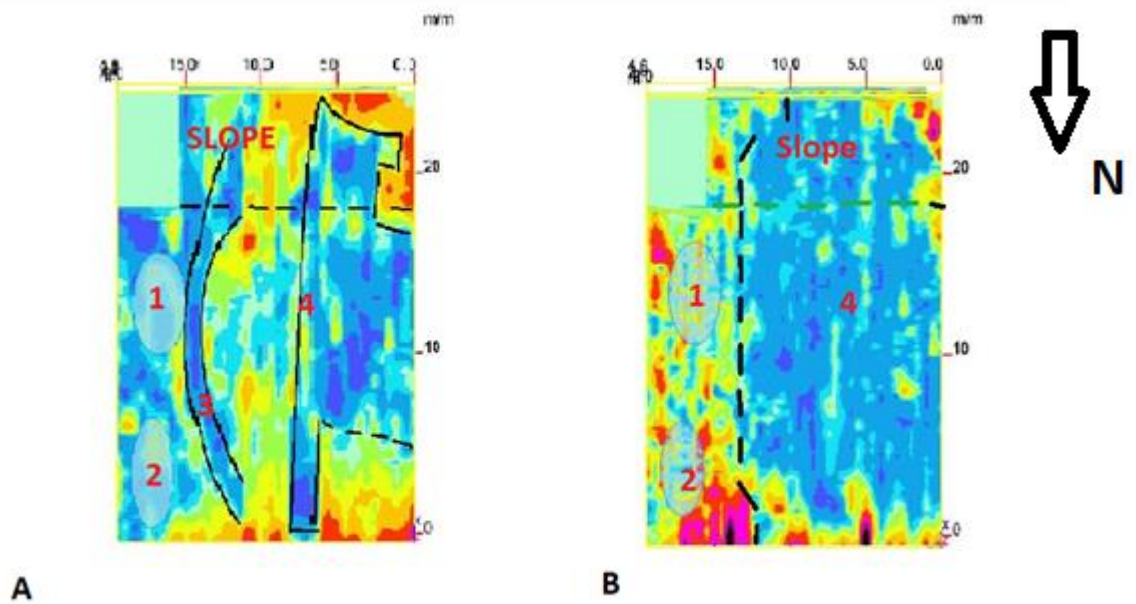
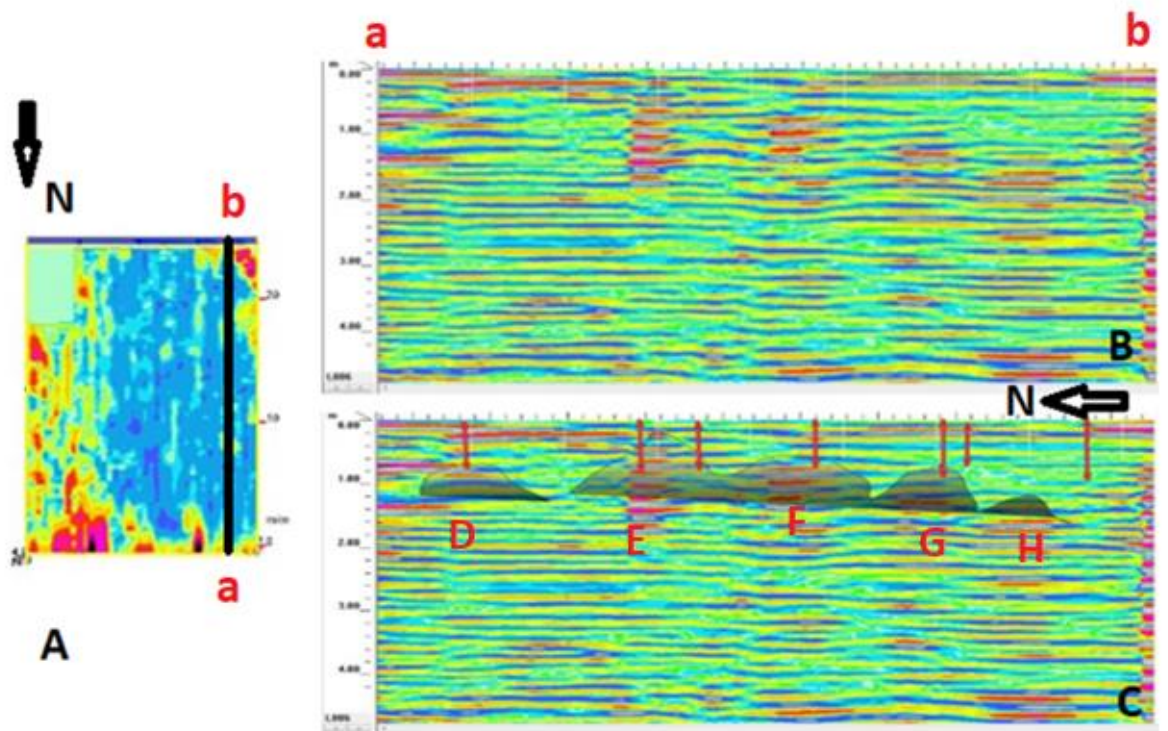


Fig. 5.13. The time-slice GPR data for grid 2b area at depth 0 m (A) and 1,15 m (B) with interpretations: A grassed area inconsistent with its surroundings(1), debris pit (2) a motortrack (3) the area with mounds (4).<sup>568</sup>

Due to the existence of mounds in the western and central parts of grid 2d (Fig. 5.13. (4)), it was challenging to recognise the origins of anomalies beneath the surface. As a result, for most features identified during the GPR survey, it is impossible to determine the original genesis of this anomaly (natural or related to human activity). Nevertheless, the profile line 2.5m (L006) is important (Fig. 5.14.) because it suggests the existence of recorded anomalies beneath the surface in the GPR data, which might be buried remains. Fig. 5.14. (C) demonstrated five anomalies beneath mounds from 2m to 3m in length (Feature D-H).

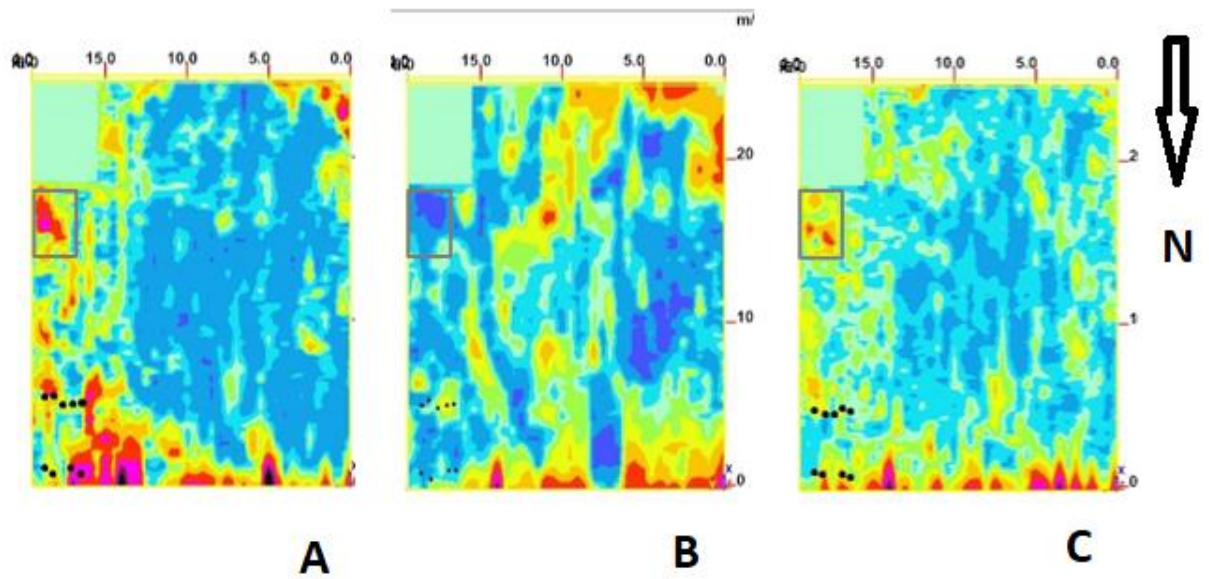
<sup>568</sup> NB: Here and later, GPR data is presented with several specific processing steps applied in RADAN 7: time zero (this filter set the top of the scan to a close approximation of the ground surface for providing a more accurate depth calculation), background removal (this filter removed some horizontal bands of noise), and test/apply filters (this filter rejected frequencies above and below an established threshold (600 and 100 MHz).)The application of mentioned filters allowed to make features on the GPR data more visible.



*Fig. 5.14. Vertical profile data from GPR survey line grid 2b L006 (B), repeated with annotation for mounds (red arrows marked tops of the mounds) (C) and the profile location on the time slice (A).*

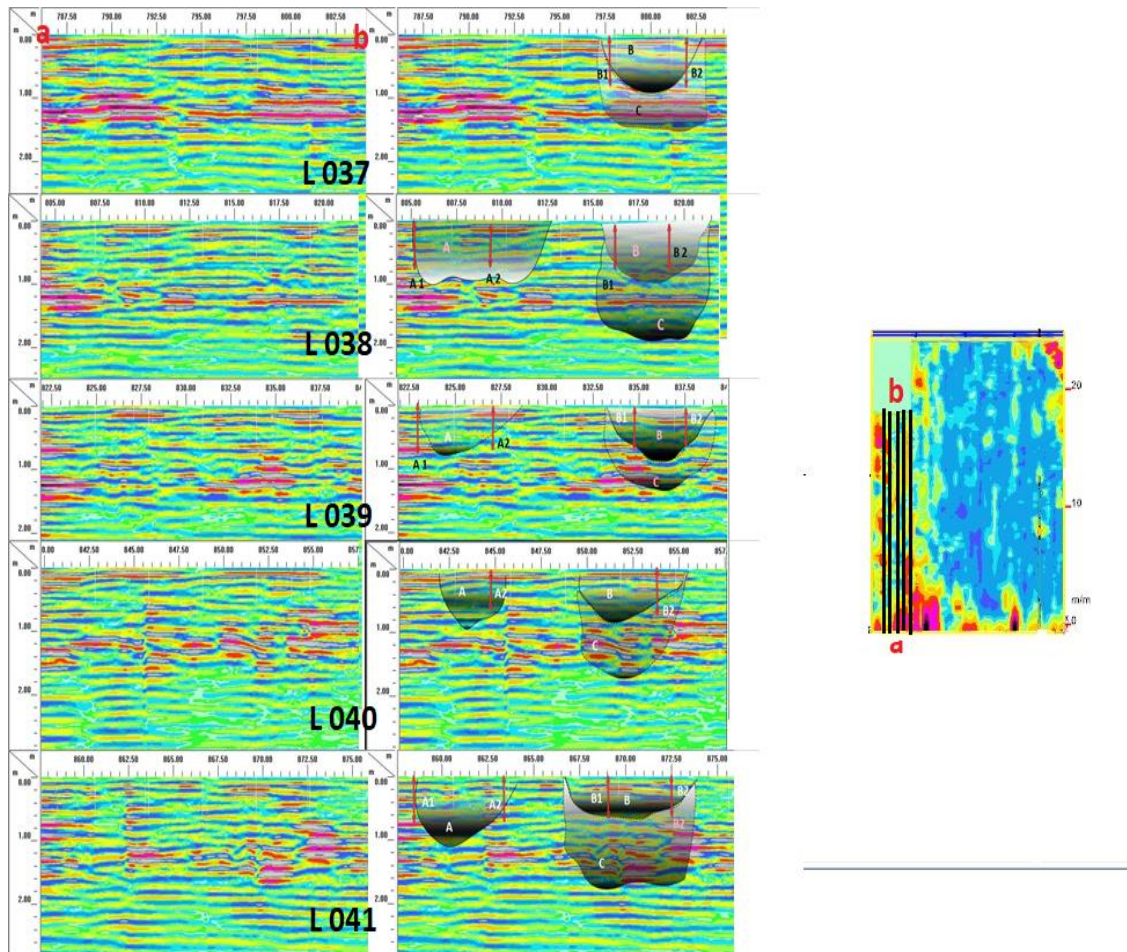
As outlined in the previous section, it is complicated to interpret data of GPR received from broken terrain in case of recognising the original dimensions of those objects. Only archaeological excavation would identify the nature of these anomalies, which of course, would not be possible in this location due to Halakha (described in Chapter 3).

In contrast with the most surveyed area, the eastern part of the surveyed grid was relatively flat and more suitable for GPR data analysis (See Fig. 5.13., the western part from motortrack (3)). Here, two probably pits were identified in the GPR results (See Plate 5.9. Feature A and Feature B).



*Fig. 5.15. Time slice of Debris pit / Feature A (marked by black dots) and possible mass grave/feature B (marked by a grey rectangle) at depths of 0 m (A), 0.28 m (B), 0.7 m (C).*

One pit (Feature A) was only clearly visible on the 2D profiles, which are demonstrated on Fig. 5.16. The location of Feature A also corresponds to a large depression that was visible on the surface. It is possible that Feature A is associated with a debris pit on the surface (Fig. 5.15.).



*Fig. 5.16. GPR vertical data profiles for survey lines 037, 038, 039, 040, 041 (Grid 2b) (left column) and the annotated version of the profiles lines: (A) feature beneath the surface related to Debris pit; (A1 – A2) boundaries of Debris pit; (B) feature beneath a grassed area inconsistent with its surroundings (possible mass grave); (B1 – B2) visible boundaries of the grassed area; (C)– Possible maximum depth to Feature B or echo effects.*

Another probable pit was clearly visible in both the 2D profiles section line and the 3D time-slices (see Fig 5.15. and 5.16.). This anomaly (Feature B) was recorded at a depth of 1.5-1.8 m beneath the surface in the GPR (see Fig. 5.16.). The measurement of Feature B was 3m x 5m and it had u-shape edges. The 2D profile sections demonstrated areas of disturbance in the first 0.8m to 1 m (Fig. 5.16. (B)) with echo effects below (Fig. 5.16. (C)). In addition, a grassed area inconsistent with its surroundings was located precisely in this part of the grid. As was already discussed, the intensive vegetation might be interpreted as one of the taphonomic markers for the identification of possible burial sites location (see Section 3.2.3. in Chapter 3).



#### 5.5.4. Discussion

Due to ground conditions, landscape and soil characteristics, geophysical data did not allow for the identification of all possible mass grave locations in the surveyed area accurately. As already described in Chapter 3, current non-invasive technologies do not clearly recognise human remains beneath the surface but rather show anomalies (natural and anthropogenic). Extensive disturbance of the ground within the area of survey (hilly terrain, human activity) impacted the density and consistency of the soil, and the topsoil layer was extensively disturbed.

Nevertheless, cross-referencing with other sources allows a more accurate analysis of GPR data to take place. For example, Fig. 5.17. demonstrates examples of recorded mass graves on GPR vertical data profiles from other Holocaust-related sites in Ukraine. All examples given in this Plate have u-shape edges. In addition, the recording of disturbances from surfaces in combination with the echo effects below features, as presented in parts A and B of Fig. 5.17., was sufficient to be taken as evidence of mass graves on those sites.<sup>569</sup> The similarity of data with other sites can be another argument that Feature B is a possible mass grave of the Holocaust victims in Slavuta.

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<sup>569</sup> NB: in addition, the existence of mass grave in those areas were confirmed with other types of sources, e.g. aerial photos, eyewitness testimonies and/or archival documents.

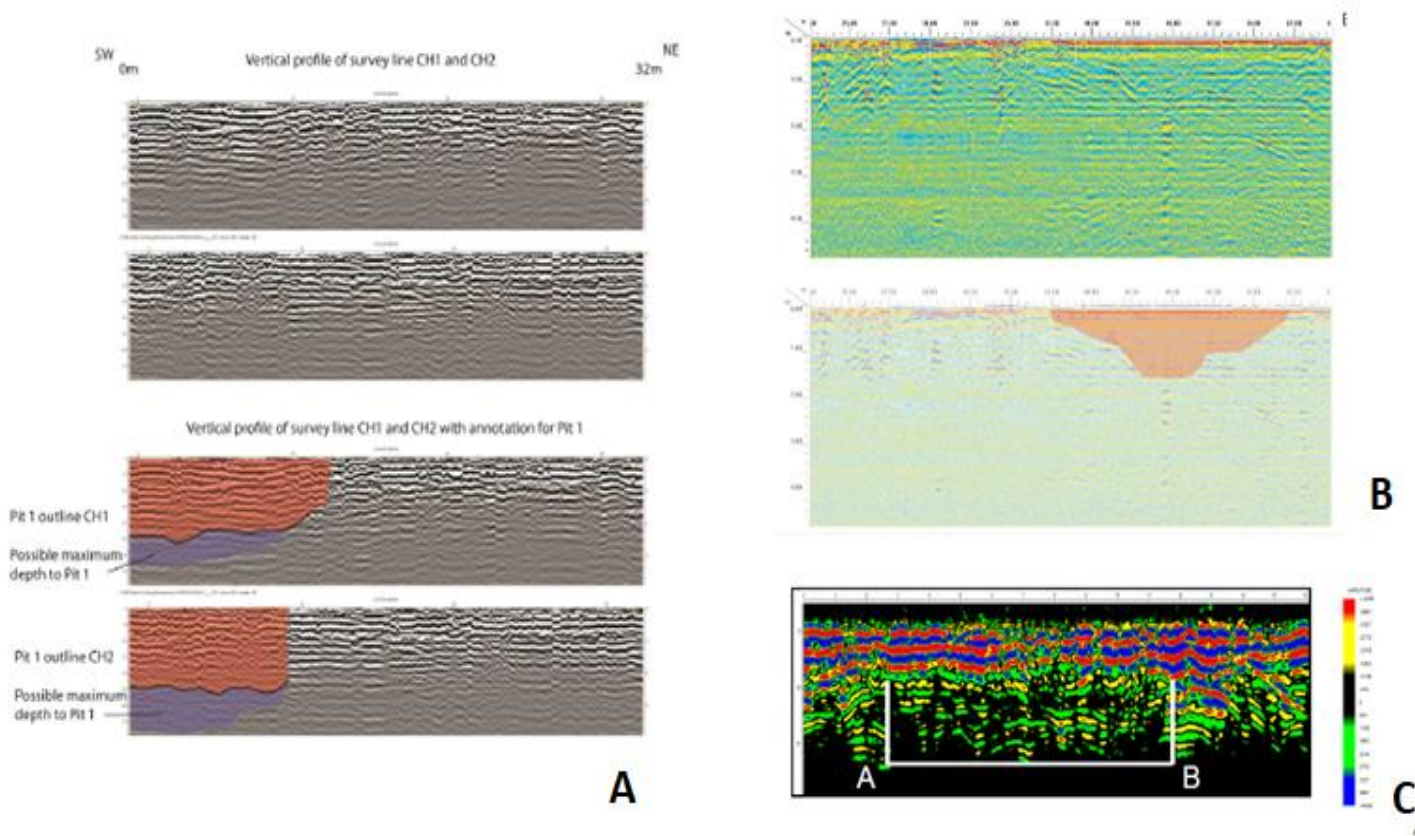


Fig. 5.17. GPR vertical data profiles from (A) Chukiv (courtesy of the Centre of Archaeology)<sup>570</sup>; (B) Rohatyn (courtesy of Rohatyn Jewish Heritage); (C) Bryukhovychi (courtesy of Geoscope).<sup>571</sup>

Following the survey, additional archival research at the Yad Vashem archive led to the discovery of more accurate information not available to the author in 2019 regarding mass grave locations near the Water Tower.<sup>572</sup> Fig. 5.18. demonstrated the approximate location of the mass graves identified in 1944 and the location of the survey grid in 2019. It is clearly demonstrated that the excavation conducted by the Extraordinary Commission members in 1944 took place in a slightly different location. This Figure also confirmed the theory that, most likely, 11 mounds, which were recorded in the Grid 2b area, did not relate to the 11 mounds identified by the Extraordinary Commission members (see Section 5.4.1.).

<sup>571</sup> The CoA (2016); The CoA (2020)<https://rohatynjewishheritage.org/en/projects/mass-grave-survey-2017/>; Geoscope (2014).

<sup>572</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 88 **The location of mass graves and the PoW cemeteries, drawn by the members of the Extraordinary Commission on 26th April 1944.**



*Fig. 5.18. The location of the GPR investigating area (red quadrilateral) and the approximate location of the mass graves that were recorded by the Extraordinary Commission in 1944 (green circle).*

Nevertheless, the particular combination of attributes: the colonisation of vegetation, disturbance from surface and u-shape edges of Feature B, and dimensions consistent with average dimensions of graves discovered by the Extraordinary Commission mentioned in Table 5.3., make it possible to suggest the likelihood that Feature B may be a Holocaust burial. In addition, the GPR survey recorded several anomalies beneath the mounds, which also might be potential unmarked burial sites.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

An examination of several mass graves of Jewish Holocaust victims in Slavuta reveals the complexities and uniqueness of the Holocaust-era events in this Ukrainian city. In this chapter, new insights into the spatial layout of mass graves were provided, and a reconstruction of the mass murder process was outlined. Cross-comparison of the wide range of sources (archival, oral history and archaeological data) facilitated an analysis of the findings outlined in the Extraordinary Commission report and provided new details of both killing and investigation procedures. In addition, the non-invasive methods applied for

the investigation near the Holocaust memorial in Slavuta allowed at least one previously unknown Holocaust-era burial site to be identified. Moreover, several other potential sites were revealed for further research.

The comprehensive approach demonstrated the potential to re-evaluate the previous forensic investigation results and presented how much unknown information could be available from well-known sources. For example, it was explained how the Soviet experts concluded numbers of victims, which most researchers overstated. With no explanation of these numbers in the past, victims became a tool for Holocaust revisionists. Furthermore, this chapter presented a comprehensive reconstruction of Jewish mass murders near the Water Tower, employing many unpublished documents and forensic analysis based on modern knowledge.

However, this chapter highlighted some limits to the application of forensic methods. For instance, the issue of mass graves investigation on sites with possible multiple burials made in the same or close timeframes but different executors (Soviet political repressions, the Holodomor, the Holocaust). In addition, this case study demonstrated that the current non-invasive techniques are limited by ground conditions, landscape, and available historical information. However, GPR-derived data allowed a potential location of a mass grave to be located in this area. At the time of writing, the available information and archaeological data about Holocaust-related mass graves near the Water Tower are enough to state that a wider area should be recognised as a burial site and receive protection status from the local authorities.

Overall, even though the archaeological data confirmed facts from other sources, this research, also following other similar investigations across Europe (for example, in Treblinka), raised the question: if whether scholars, local community and authorities have forgotten or failed to uncover, considerable information about the human remains beneath the surface at one of the best described in the literature and sources of killing sites in Ukraine, how much likely to have missed about smaller, lesser-known sites?<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2012) p. 230.

## 6. The Holocaust in Slavuta: The PoW camps

*This chapter is dedicated to all Ukrainian PoWs who were captured, tortured and murdered during the Russo-Ukrainian War (2014 - ...), including victims of the Olenivka prison massacre. Heroes do not die, and all their burial sites will be identified and commemorated.*

### 6.1. Introduction

Slavuta is mainly associated with the stalag *Grosslazarett Slawuta* (the Great Hospital), which was situated on the edge of the city in the so-called military town (the Soviet military base). During the Nuremberg trials, the Slavuta case was presented as an illustrative example of the cruelty of the Nazi regime against the Soviet PoWs.<sup>574</sup> However, only a few researches about this camp, and the men housed within it, have been conducted but none of those researches covered the campscape and men who were housed there comprehensively and further analysis is still required.<sup>575</sup> Moreover, the remains of the camp have almost disappeared in the current landscape of Slavuta (see Plate 6.1.).

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<sup>574</sup> *Trial of the Major War Crimes before The International Military Tribunal* (1947) Vol. II, p. 65; *Trial of* (1947). Vol. VII, pp. 403-405.

<sup>575</sup> NB: Those research were published in limited print circulation and at the time of writing, were unavailable for the author.



*Plate 6.1. The remains of the former PoW camp (barracks 7 and 9) in Slavuta in October 2018.  
Author's own photo.*

Datner, who was one of the first researchers of WWII PoW camps, underlined the exceptional role of the PoW camp in Slavuta in the system of the Nazi atrocity against Soviet PoWs.<sup>576</sup> Modern historians Kruglov and Umanskii point out that, based on the Extraordinary Commissions data, in terms of the number of victims the Slavuta camp was not only the largest in Ukraine but also in the entire Third Reich with its occupied Eastern territories. According to their calculations, the number of deceased PoWs in that camp amounted to 11.4% of all captured soldiers that died in the territory of present Ukraine.<sup>577</sup> According to Shneyer, Slavuta was the main hub that gathered all injured and sick captured military personnel from Western and Right-Bank Ukraine.<sup>578</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to identify possible mass and individual graves of PoWs within the Grosslazarett campscape based on the combination and cross-referencing of different types of sources: historical documents, non-invasive archaeological data (collected by the author) and eyewitness testimonies (as per the methodology described in Chapter 3). An essential component was to use a cutting-edge methodology derived from forensic

<sup>576</sup> Datner, Sz. (1968) p. 428.

<sup>577</sup> Kruglov, A. and Umanskii, A. (2011) 'Mezhdunarodnaia nauchnaia konferentsiia "Natsytskiye lageria na okkupirovannoi sovetskoi territorii (Parizh, 19-20 Sentiabria 2011 g.)', *Holokost i suchasnist'*, 1 (9), 167.

<sup>578</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 273. NB: archival sources show that many inmates were captured during the Battle of Crimea (1941-1942).

archaeology and post-war eyewitness testimonies to verify the Extraordinary Commission's reports about the site. In the context of its purpose, this chapter will only provide a brief overview of the history of the camp and its prisoners, but certainly, the history of this camp requires a separate study. Some details were provided about the camp topography and demography for a better understanding of who, when and due to what causes were buried in the campsite of Slavuta. In order to reach the purpose of the chapter, not only deceased inmates were analysed but also former ones, those who survived and died after the liberation.

### 6.1.1. Treatment of the Soviet Prisoners of War in German captivity

Soviet PoWs were the second largest group of Nazi victims after Jews.<sup>579</sup> About 5,754,000 Soviet soldiers and officers were captured during WWII and between 3,000,000 and 3,300,000 died in captivity.<sup>580</sup> This statement needs to be qualified because the USSR was a multinational state where national identity was severely impacted by ideology,<sup>581</sup> so there is frequent confusion about the national identity of victims. The term *Soviet PoWs* covered many ethnicities from the territory of the Soviet Union, including but not limited to Ukrainians, Kazakhs, Jews, Russians, and Uzbeks serving in a single division of the Red Army or who had been members of the Soviet resistance. There were nearly 100 nationalities identified in the 1939 population census of the USSR.<sup>582</sup> They all self-identified as "Soviet". The most common word which Germans used for identifying the Red Army PoW's was *Bolsheviks* (after The Communist Party of Bolsheviks) or simply *Russians*.<sup>583</sup> The local population of occupied territories of the USSR identified the PoWs as "ours" and usually tried to help them by feeding or hiding them.<sup>584</sup>

The justification for terror against the Soviet officers was created even before the start of Operation Barbarossa (the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Third Reich and Allies which

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<sup>579</sup> The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum *Holocaust Encyclopedia. Nazi persecution of Soviet Prisoners of War. Available at: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-persecution-of-soviet-prisoners-of-war>* (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>580</sup> Arad, Y. (2009) p. 376; Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 96.

<sup>581</sup> Martin, T. (2013) *Imperiya natsional'nogo vyrvivniuvannia. Natsii ta natsionalizm u Radians'komu Soyuzi (1923-1939)*. Kyiv: Krytyka.

<sup>582</sup> *Vsesoiuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1939 goda. Natsional'nyi sostav po respublikam (1939) Available at [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_39.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_39.php)* (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>583</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011) pp. 98-99.

<sup>584</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011) p. 99.

began on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941). The Commissar order (*Kommissarbefehl*) or Guidelines for the Treatment of Political Commissars (*Richtlinien für die Behandlung politischer Kommissare*) was issued on 6 June 1941. According to this Order, all Soviet political officers identified among the captured soldiers had to be executed immediately as enforcers of Communism ideology.<sup>585</sup> The beginning of a military campaign of the Third Reich against the USSR had dire consequences for the Red Army. In the first months of the occupation of the Soviet Union, nearly 250,000 combatants were captured.<sup>586</sup> Later, the situation was getting worse for the Soviet troops. For example, during the Kyiv strategic defensive operation in September 1941, about 665,000 Red Army personnel surrendered.<sup>587</sup> In the early stages of the campaign, Wehrmacht was not prepared to hold that many prisoners. The penitentiary infrastructure was created on the ground. Frequently, especially in the first months of the war, Soviet PoWs were not registered and were killed at the place of capture.<sup>588</sup> This primarily applied to imaginary enemies of the Reich: commissars, Jews, NKVD personnel, including border troops members as a part of NKVD.<sup>589</sup> There were a lot of well-documented cases when other prisoners assisted those categories in hiding them among the rest of PoWs, as well as many opposite cases when some inmates assisted Nazis in singling out Soviet officers or Jews.<sup>590</sup>

PoWs who were not executed immediately were held in transit camps (*dulag*), and then moved, frequently by foot, to stationary camps (*stalags* and *oflags*).<sup>591</sup> A small number of civilians could be imprisoned among servicemen and servicewomen in those camps, usually men and youths who were perceived as potential rebels.<sup>592</sup> The main instrument for the annihilation of the Soviet PoWs was starvation.<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Shtrait, K. (2009) *Oni nam ne tovarischi: Wermakht i sovetskiye voyennoplennyye v 1941-1945 gg.* Russkaya panorama, pp. 45 – 50; Полян с. 219. NB: Judeo-Bolshevism Myth played an essential role in Nazis propaganda. According to this antisemitic canard, Jewish people were responsible for the organisation of the Bolshevik Revolution (October Revolution) in 1917 and Soviet terror and repressions.

<sup>586</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011) p. 106.

<sup>587</sup> Krivosheev, G., Andronikov, V., Burikov, P. (1993) *Grif sekretnosti sniat: Poteri Vooruzhennyh Sil SSSR v voinah, boyevykh deistviyah i voennykh konfliktah: statisticheskoye issledovaniye.* Moscow: Voenizdat, p. 174; Berkhoff, K. (2011) p. 99; NB Probably, the majority of first inmates in Slavuta were captured during this operation.

<sup>588</sup> Reinhard, O. (2005) pp 129 – 130; Shtrait, K. (2009) pp. 111 - 114

<sup>589</sup> Shtrait, K. (2009) pp.92-111.

<sup>590</sup> Arad, Yi. (2009) pp. 378 – 379. Shneyer, A. (2005);

<sup>591</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) ch. 1; Berkhoff, K. (2011) pp 100-101.

<sup>592</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011) p. 107; Porter, T. (2009) 'Hitler's *Rassenkampf* in the East: The Forgotten Genocide of Soviet POWs', *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 37, 6, p 361.

<sup>593</sup> Shtrait K. Oni nam ne... pp. 144 – 171; Shneyer, A. (2005) pp. 187 – 200.



The Third Reich also claimed that humane treatment for the Soviet PoW was not obligatory because the USSR never signed the Convention related to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Geneva, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1929).<sup>594</sup> In addition, according to Nazi ideology, Soviet combatants were considered to be ideological enemies and were supposed to be eliminated for conquering "living space" for Germans in the East.

All those general trends could be applied to Slavuta's inmates, as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

### 6.1.2. Historical background of the camps in Slavuta

The campscape in Slavuta was located on the territory of the barracks of a former Soviet military base (inhabited by the 20<sup>th</sup> Red Flag Border Patrol, which consisted of 1,569 people on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941).<sup>595</sup> The barracks were built specifically for military purposes in 1937 at the city's southern edge.<sup>596</sup> Perhaps, the construction of the new military base was one of the stages of the construction of the Stalin Line.<sup>597</sup> Until 1939, the USSR-Poland border ran through these lands, and according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact<sup>598</sup>, part of Western Ukrainian territories was annexed by the USSR. Notably, Border Patrol forces were under the supervision of NKVD (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs). For a better understanding of the landscape, it should be noted that besides state border patrolling duties, these forces were also tasked with executions during the Great Terror (as already discussed in Chapter 5 and see Plate 6.2.).<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>594</sup> Polian, P. (2002) pp. 69-82; Porter, T. (2009) p 361; Berkhoff, K. (2011), pp. 99-100.

<sup>595</sup> *Struktura RKKa I SSSR na 1941 g.* Available at: [www.rkka.ru.i22](http://www.rkka.ru.i22) (Accessed on: 11 November 2021).

<sup>596</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 19 *Minutes of the camp survey, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944.*

<sup>597</sup> The Stalin Line was a fortification system along the western borders of the Soviet Union (borders on 1939). The construction works began in the late 1920s for the protection of the Soviet territories against attacks from the west. After annexation of Polish territories and the invasion of the Baltic states, this line was abandoned, and the new Molotov line started to construct along new borders.

<sup>598</sup> NB: The pact was signed in Moscow by the Foreigner Ministers of the USSR V. Molotov and the Third Reich J. von Ribbentrop, 23 August 1939. This Pact included the Secret Protocol, which divided the spheres of interest of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in Europe. Soon after this Pact, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union began the invasion of Poland (1 September and 17 September 1939).

<sup>599</sup> *Protokol No 273 Materialy na obviniayemykh, predstavlennye NKVD Ukrainskoi SSR (po 20-mu Slavutskomu Pogranotriadu) v poriadke prikaza NKVD No 00485 (1937)* Courtesy Prudkovskiy, S.



*Plate 6.2. The members of the 20th border patrol squad of the NKVD in Slavuta, the 1 May 1936. Aburachman Burchanov – a gunsmith of the border patrol in Slavuta, worked in the penal system by 1941 (orange circle).<sup>600</sup>*

As already mentioned, the territory of "military town" (military base) was located on the edge of the city and had very restricted access. According to witness testimony, there were sand quarries to the south of the military base before the war (perhaps the quarry exists today, close to mass graves near the Water Tower, see Chapter 5).<sup>601</sup> Those factors suggest this site as a possible location for killing or burial sites related to the Soviet Terror and pose the challenge already raised in the previous chapter for this research: to investigate mass graves of PoWs in the landscape where mass graves related to other genocide and mass violence are possibly present.

It was common for Germans to convert former Soviet military bases into ghettos or camps, e.g. military base in Yarmolintsy was used as a camp for Jews from the ghetto and Soviet

<sup>600</sup> Astrakanskii gosudarstvennyi obiedenennyi istoriko-arhitekturnyi muzei-zapovednik, F-26190

<sup>601</sup> YIU, 892 U

PoWs,<sup>602</sup> Nord Oflag for the Soviet officers in Volodymyr,<sup>603</sup> PoW camp in Vinnytsia.<sup>604</sup> In the case of Slavuta, two possible factors played an essential role when the location was chosen:

- 1) As the camp was a **border control base**, it was undoubtedly a convenient place with the necessary infrastructure for stationing a large number of PoWs (e.g., barracks ready for use, open territory surrounded by a fence etc) as well as for providing limited access to the camp and preventing escapes from the camp (e.g., the camp area was situated on the edge of the city, surrounded with woodlands). The landscape from Shepetivka to Slavuta was relatively flat (part of Polissia lowland) and covered by a large continuous mass of pine forest, which lent itself to good cover and was used for hideouts.<sup>605</sup>
  
- 2) The proximity to railways allowed for **logistical convenience**. The Slavuta railway station was located on the Kyiv-Koziatyn-Berdychiv-Shepetivka-Kryvyn line. It linked the Soviet Union with the European countries before WWII and connected Kyiv, the capital of Soviet Ukraine and Rivne, the "capital" of Reichkommissariat Ukraine, during the war. The railway up to Shepetivka (one of the largest railway hubs of the Ukrainian SSR) was dual-track, and it was single-track in the west direction (to Rivne)<sup>606</sup>. In addition to good railway communications, Slavuta was in proximity to the highway: Ostroh-Slavuta-Shepetivka-Bilopillia that fed into Kyiv and connected with Lviv via Kremenets, and the section from Kryvin to Berdychiv was essentially a straight line.<sup>607</sup> This location was extremely convenient and advantageous for logistical purposes, especially considering the poor development of logistics infrastructure in the Ukrainian SSR before the war. It is fair to say that Slavuta was on the main access route between Reichkommissariat Ukraine and Third Reich (see Fig. 6.1.).

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<sup>602</sup> Yarmolyntsy in *The Untold stories* (web page) Available at: <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/untold-stories/killing-site/14626824-Yarmolintsy-Military-Barrack> (Accessed 20 August 2019).

<sup>603</sup> Stalag 365 (Oflag 11a, Nord Oflag 365) Available at: <https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A8%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3-365> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>604</sup> Vinnitsa in *The Untold stories* (web page).

<sup>605</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 597, p.87 **Military-geographical description. Handbook for north Rightbank area of Ukraine.**

<sup>606</sup> Here should be mentioned that Polish and Soviet railways had different widths of track gauge: Polish 1,435 and Soviet 1,520 mm. Before the annexation of Western Ukraine, trains from the Soviet Union had to change wheelsets to be suitable for the Polish railway or load the cargo into another train.

<sup>607</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 597, p.98 **Military-geographical description. Handbook for north Rightbank area of Ukraine.**



*Fig. 6.1. The location of Slavuta (violet dot) on the German map of Soviet railways and highways, 1941.*

The exact date of the establishment of the PoW camp in Slavuta is unknown. Some eyewitnesses stated that the first inmates of Slavuta started to arrive there immediately after the occupation of Slavuta (July 1941), during the Defence of Kyiv (July – September 1941) from Shepetivka.<sup>608</sup> Historians mention that the first inmates were transferred to Slavuta in the autumn of 1941.<sup>609</sup> Possibly, the enormous amount of Soviet soldiers captured during the Nazi-Soviet war caused the organisation of a field or transit camp for them in Slavuta in the summer of 1941 and conversion to a permanent camp in the autumn of 1941. Historian Berkovski stated that the PoW camp in Slavuta appeared in late September 1941. According to him, Stalag 301 was transferred to Kovel from occupied Poland on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1941.<sup>610</sup> The camp in Slavuta was known as Stalag 301/z (the z indicating that it was an auxiliary camp) and was a division of the PoW camp in Kovel.<sup>611</sup> Shatalov, who worked in the 'military town' before the war, recalled that the preparation of the campsite for inmates (e.g., surrounding the camp with a barbed wire fence and repairs of the barracks) occurred in September 1941 (see Plate 6.3.).<sup>612</sup> This stalag was in

<sup>608</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 35, 137, 147 *Testimonies of Ye. Galitskaya, G. Sayenko, E. Slavianskaya.*

<sup>609</sup> Datner, Sz. (1968) p. 428; Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 273;

<sup>610</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b).

<sup>611</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/8793, p. 5 *Inhaltsverzeichnis Das Kriegsgefangenenwesen.*

<sup>612</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 171 *Testimony of A. Shatalov.*

Slavuta from September 1941 to November 1942, and later it was transferred to Shepetivka (20 km from Slavuta).<sup>613</sup> It seems that only the camp administration was moved to the nearby city, but the guards, camp personnel and prisoners remained in Slavuta. Some camp documents support this theory: e.g. Order 6 on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1942 regarding the circulation of medications and medical tools in the camp barracks was given by the chief doctor of stalag 301.<sup>614</sup> The stalag 357 was transferred to Slavuta and stayed there from March to October 1943, and this camp administration was also transferred there from Shepetivka.<sup>615</sup> The camp remained in Slavuta until the liberation of the city in January 1944. The soldiers of the Red Army and local doctor Voitseschuk found 525 inmates alive when they arrived at camp on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1944.<sup>616</sup> Local catholic priest Milewski recalled that he heard that the Germans evacuated about 7,000 prisoners before the liberation of Slavuta, and about 9,000 inmates remained at the camp in December 1943-January 1944.<sup>617</sup> Perhaps, some of them fled from the camp area when the Germans left Slavuta and hid in the vicinity. Those facts suggest that the camp in Slavuta had its own camp administration located in Slavuta at some periods of operation of the camp, but sometimes it was operated by the camp administration from Shepetivka, where the district administration was also located.<sup>618</sup>

### 6.1.3. Camp administration and personnel

Berkovskii proposed this version of the structure of the camp in Slavuta<sup>619</sup>:

*General camp administration:* Mostly officers who were close to retirement were members of the camp administration<sup>620</sup> including camp commandants (stalag 301) Oberleutnant Garbauer, Hauptmann Plank, (stalag 357) Major Pawlisk, and Hauptmanns Noe and Kronsdorfer.<sup>621</sup> According to Datner, the camp administration members should have at

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<sup>613</sup>Berkovskii, V. (2014 b); *PoW Camps: List Available at <http://www.moosburg.org/info/stalag/laglist.html#sowje>* (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>614</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 8 *Entlassungsausweis Moltschanenko Nadeschda*.

<sup>615</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b); *PoW Camps: List*

<sup>616</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 44 *Act of medico-legal expertise, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1944*.

<sup>617</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 108 *Testimony of D. Milevskii*.

<sup>618</sup> That was also indirectly confirmed by the statements of the former camp workers (from locals) Grigorii Sayenko: YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, pp. 58 *Act of medico-legal expertise, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1944*.

<sup>619</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b).

<sup>620</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b).

<sup>621</sup>Berkovskii, V. (2014 b); YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.799, pp.19-20 *Decree regarding forwarding material of investigation in Slavuta to Ukrainian Republican Commission for estimating and investigating German-Fascist Crimes*. All names mentioned here are given in transcription from Russian. Unfortunately, the list of camp personnel in German is not found.

least the rank of Oberst or Oberstleutenant (the equivalent of Colonel or Lieutenant colonel).<sup>622</sup> As shown, the camp administration in Slavuta had lower ranks, possibly due to the fact that the stalag there was an auxiliary. There were also at least two Sonderfuhrers: Apel, who was fluent in Russian, and Rozenik.<sup>623</sup> Hauptmann Noe had a dog and often set it loose against inmates.<sup>624</sup>

*German medical personnel:* The head of the medical service in the camp was medical officer Dr Borbe.<sup>625</sup> His deputy was assistant physician Dr Sturm.<sup>626</sup> Possibly, Dr Sturm replaced Dr Borbe in his position.<sup>627</sup> Dr Sturm had an assistant Dr Hertz.<sup>628</sup> Even when the camp administration was changed, he stayed in the same position.<sup>629</sup>

One of the unlicensed assistive personnel Binkler (who was a member of German medical personnel) was arrested by the Soviets in Slavuta.<sup>630</sup>

*Camp personnel (locals):* Many locals worked in the camp since the start of operations. The first workers were sent to stalag by the City Council in 1941.<sup>631</sup> Later in 1942, locals were sent to the camp by the Public Employment Service in Slavuta.<sup>632</sup> Most of the local people were involved in the maintenance of the camp (cleaning, paperwork, work at the camp kitchen etc.), but some of them worked as camp guards or executors, for example former camp guard Karpliuk worked at City Council but regularly participated in executions in the camp.<sup>633</sup> Later, he was evacuated from Slavuta with the Germans.

The camp workers had to hold a special entry permit.<sup>634</sup> Access to the camp was denied for former camp worker Shatalov in May 1942 after the mass execution of Jews near the Water

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<sup>622</sup> Datner, Sz. (1968) p. 45.

<sup>623</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 147 [Testimony of E. Slavianskaya](#).

<sup>624</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 147 [Testimony of E. Slavianskaya](#).

<sup>625</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 4 [Order for the Hospital, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1943](#).

<sup>626</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 3 [Order for the Hospital No 32](#).

<sup>627</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 147 [Testimony of E. Slavianskaya](#).

<sup>628</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 147 [Testimony of E. Slavianskaya](#).

<sup>629</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.51 [Testimony of N. Zhmuydanovich](#).

<sup>630</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 181 [Testimony of P. Binkler](#).

<sup>631</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 15 [Testimony of D. Bukhtiyuchuk](#).

<sup>632</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 51, 57 [Testimonies of N. Zhmuydanovich, L. Zadachina](#).

<sup>633</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.799, pp. 20 [Decree regarding forwarding material of investigation in Slavuta to Ukrainian Republican Commission for estimating and investigating German-Fascist Crimes, 32 b Inventory of attached documents](#).

<sup>634</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 51 [Testimony of N. Zhmuydanovich](#).

Tower (see chapter 5). One of the victims killed there was his wife, and he was deemed unreliable.<sup>635</sup> In addition, civilians who worked in the camp could not communicate with inmates.<sup>636</sup>

*Camp personnel (PoW guards):* Each PoW camp was supposed to have *Lagerpolizei* (camp police) consisting of prisoners with batons or whips.<sup>637</sup> According to some testimony, the camp was guarded by kazaks.<sup>638</sup> Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine which camp period this refers to. The internal regulation in the camp was supervised by Major Bushuev from 1941-1942. He served in Slavuta before the war.<sup>639</sup> The guards of the camp sometimes traded with prisoners but more often took away prisoner's personal belongings and food.<sup>640</sup>

The former feldsher (physician assistant) Mitrofanski (his nickname among inmates was Black Crown) was responsible for the identification of Jews among the inmates.<sup>641</sup> He organised raids into barracks, lined up inmates and selected Jews.<sup>642</sup> Someone from the Nazis always accompanied him during these raids.<sup>643</sup> People suspected of Jewish ethnicity were undressed and shot near mass graves.<sup>644</sup> Mitrofanskii had an assistant called Dode who helped him identify possible Jews.<sup>645</sup> Presumably, some prisoners also betrayed Jews, communists and officers.<sup>646</sup> Perhaps, sometimes former PoWs participated in the executions in the camp, e.g. Khlebnoi, a former train driver, shot Soviet partisan Mikhailovin in 1942.<sup>647</sup> Later, Major Bushuev and Mitrofanskii were transferred to another camp.<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.171 [Testimony of A. Shatalov.](#)

<sup>636</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.59 [Testimony of L. Zadachina.](#)

<sup>637</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011) p. 107.

<sup>638</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.142 [Testimony of G. Sayenko.](#)

<sup>639</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 138 [Testimony of G. Sayenko.](#)

<sup>640</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 18-19 [Testimony of S. Valiyev.](#)

<sup>641</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 19, 127 [Testimonies of S. Valiyev.](#)

<sup>642</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 42 [Testimony of V. Degtiariov.](#)

<sup>643</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 166 [Testimony of I.Khuazhev.](#)

<sup>644</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 19 [Testimony of S. Valiyev.](#)

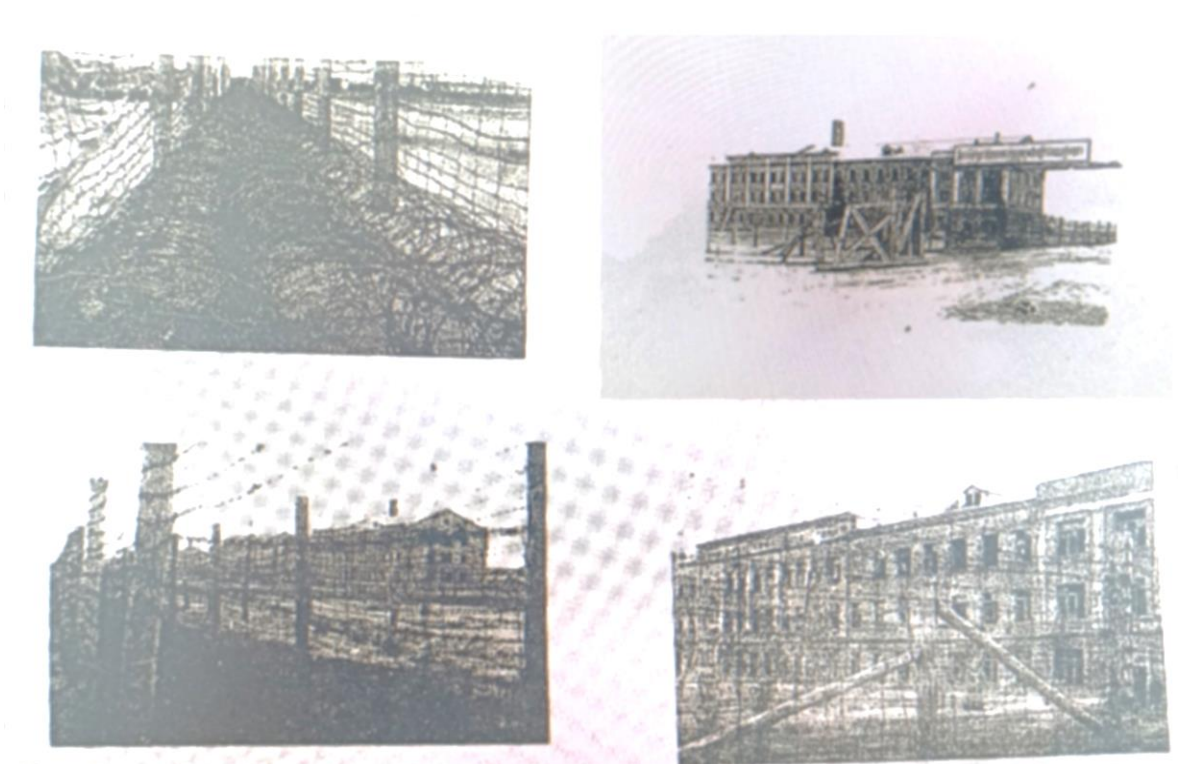
<sup>645</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.161 [Testimony of V. Filippov.](#)

<sup>646</sup> YVA O.3. / 6712 [Testimony of Grunia Grigoriev.](#);

<sup>647</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.799, p. 22 [Report about the camp survey, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1944.](#) Later, Klebnoi were killed by Soviet partisans in Slavuta in 1944.

<sup>648</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 59 and 166 [Testimonies of L. Zadachina and I.Khuazhev.](#)

The guard of the barrack 2 Shylinger was evacuated to the field hospital with the surviving inmates of the camp in 1944, but his further destiny is unknown.<sup>649</sup>



*Plate 6.3. Views of the stalag in Slavuta in 1944.*<sup>650</sup>

## 6.2. Topography of the camp

The camp was located on the territory of 1 sq km (Fig. 6.2.): there were six three-story buildings on the east side where PoWs were held (later demolished, date unknown); on the north side (across Yaroslav Mudry St. today), there were four more three-story buildings which were used as barracks for PoWs inmates (three of which remain, but are abandoned or used as a dormitory (former barrack 7)).<sup>651</sup> The locations of those buildings had been identified by examining testimonies and the visible traces in the landscape (on the ground and in satellite imagery) (Fig. 6.2)). Unfortunately, no aerial photos for this location on time when the camp was operated are now known.

<sup>649</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 20 [Testimony of S. Valiyev.](#)

<sup>650</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, pp. 89 and 111

<sup>651</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, pp. 19-20 [Decree regarding forwarding material of investigation in Slavuta to Ukrainian Republican Commission for estimating and investigating German-Fascist Crimes..](#)



The facilities for the German camp administration were located on the western side of the camp (Iziaslav St. today, later demolished, date unknown): the camp commandant's office and offices of other officials of camp administration, camp medical personnel, camp security, camp administration office that also served as a post office, a labour office that coordinated where to send PoWs as a slave labour force, and an accounting office. The other three-story building held barracks for soldiers of the camp's external security, equipment storage, guard rooms, and a cafeteria for the Germans.<sup>652</sup>

Initially, the hospital for PoWs was located only in one barrack.<sup>653</sup> The medical personnel of Slavuta's hospital recalled that local people brought injured and wounded inmates from the camp to the hospital for medical treatment in 1941, but usually, it was impossible to help them.<sup>654</sup> The hospital for wounded and injured inmates was located in barrack 6 (for more information, see section 6.2.2.), which also was the nearest to the road and the location of the hospital barrack was possibly the primary reason that the first burials were located close to the hospital (see Fig. 6.2.). According to eyewitness' testimonies, the first prisoners arrived in Slavuta by foot.<sup>655</sup> It was a common practice to transport enormous amounts of captured Soviet soldiers in the early stages of the Nazi invasion during what was known as Death marches.<sup>656</sup>

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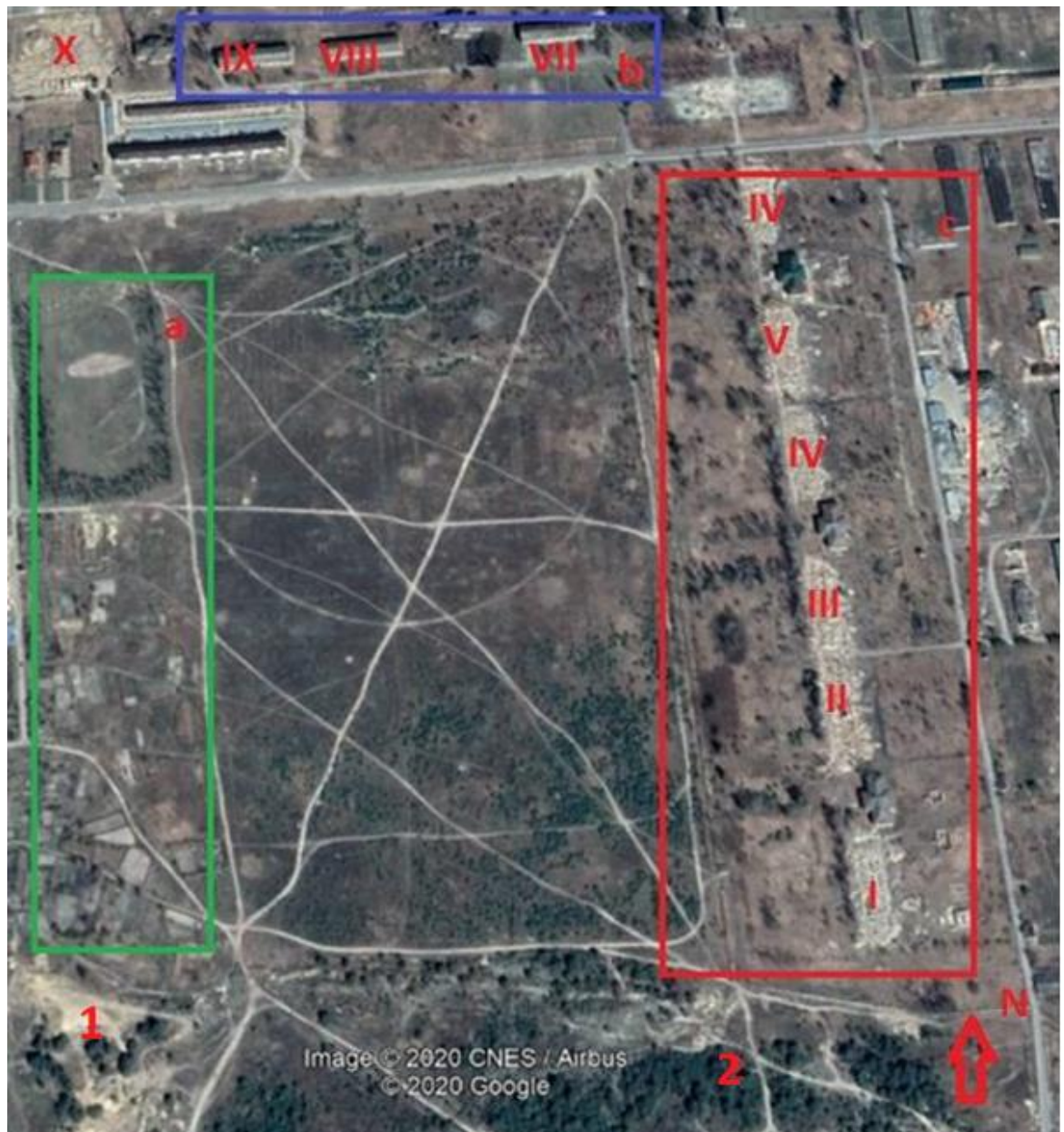
<sup>652</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b).

<sup>653</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b).

<sup>654</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6. pp. 33 and 60 [Testimonies of G. Voitseschuk and A. Ivanova.](#)

<sup>655</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 35, 137, 147 [Testimonies of Ye. Galitskaya, G. Sayenko, E. Slavianskaya..](#)

<sup>656</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011), pp. 101 – 105.



*Fig. 6.2. The campscape in Slavuta today overlaid on a Google Earth image (barracks number (I-X) according to German and Soviet sources): (1) Jewish mass graves near the Water Tower; (2) Location of commemorated part of PoW cemetery; (a) Location of German administration, patrol and military buildings; (b) PoW barracks location (remain, but abandoned or used as a dormitory); (c) PoW barracks location (demolished).*

Perhaps, the purpose of barracks changed in different periods. Certainly, various historians have suggested different uses. According to Berkovskii, each barrack had its own specialisation: 1 – for typhoid and cholera patients; 2 – for dysenteric patients; 3, 4 and 7 – surgery; 5 and 6 were therapeutic barracks.<sup>657</sup> Shevchuk added that barrack 7 was for recovering and recovered patients; 8 and 9 – were for camp personnel and inmates who

<sup>657</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b)

worked in the camp or were sent to work outside the camp; 10 – was for medical personnel (PoWs), women, and communications men (see Fig. 6.3.).<sup>658</sup> According to Shneer barrack 10 was divided into two: 10 a and 10 b.<sup>659</sup> Survivors also present additional information. Former inmate Belyi stated that barrack 2 was for patients with tuberculosis.<sup>660</sup> According to former PoW Filippov, barrack 5 was used as a transit facility for PoWs.<sup>661</sup> Former inmate Degtiariv mentioned that women were held in barrack 8 during the winter of 1943.<sup>662</sup> Another former inmate recalled that the barrack was used for housing of recovering inmates.<sup>663</sup> Camp doctor and former inmate Rodionov mentioned that barrack 8 was for prisoners in quarantine and for medical personnel.<sup>664</sup> Inmates called barracks 1 and 2 (barracks for patients with infectious diseases) *Death blocks*.<sup>665</sup> In reality, inmates were housed in barracks randomly, not based on their diagnoses or health conditions. For example, some healthy prisoners or prisoners with other wounds or diseases were transferred to barracks 1 or 2.<sup>666</sup> In addition, prisoners with symptoms of cachexia (for example, diarrhoea) were also sent to barrack 1.<sup>667</sup>

In addition, the barracks were overcrowded. According to the local priest Milewski, that was done on purpose because there usually was enough free space for housing more inmates.<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Shevshuk, Ye. (2000) 'Slavuts'kyi "Grosslazaret" – tabir smerti', in I. Vynokur (Ed) *Materialy X Podil'skoi istoriko-krayeznavchoi konferentsii*, p.122.

<sup>659</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 278.

<sup>660</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 4 [Testimony of I. Belyi](#).

<sup>661</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 157 [Testimony of V. Filippov](#).

<sup>662</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 42 [Testimony of V. Degtiariv](#).

<sup>663</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 149 [Testimony of A. Solovykh](#).

<sup>664</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 135 [Testimony of G. Rodionov](#).

<sup>665</sup> TsDAGO f. 57/op. 4 / s. 194, p. 8 [Note regarding atrocities in Slavuta](#).

<sup>666</sup>, E.g. Lzhkariov Nikolai had a gunshot wound but was treated in Barack II: YVA 7021-64-6 p.90; Maksimov Aleksei from barrack for workers (possible VIII or IX) had been transferred to barrack II when he got sick with pneumonia: YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 96 [Testimony of A. Maksimov](#); the same happened with Gul'chinskii Nikolai: YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 154 [Testimony of M. Tulchinskii](#).

<sup>667</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 67 [Testimony of I. Inozemtsev](#).

<sup>668</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.109 [Testimony of D. Milevskii](#).

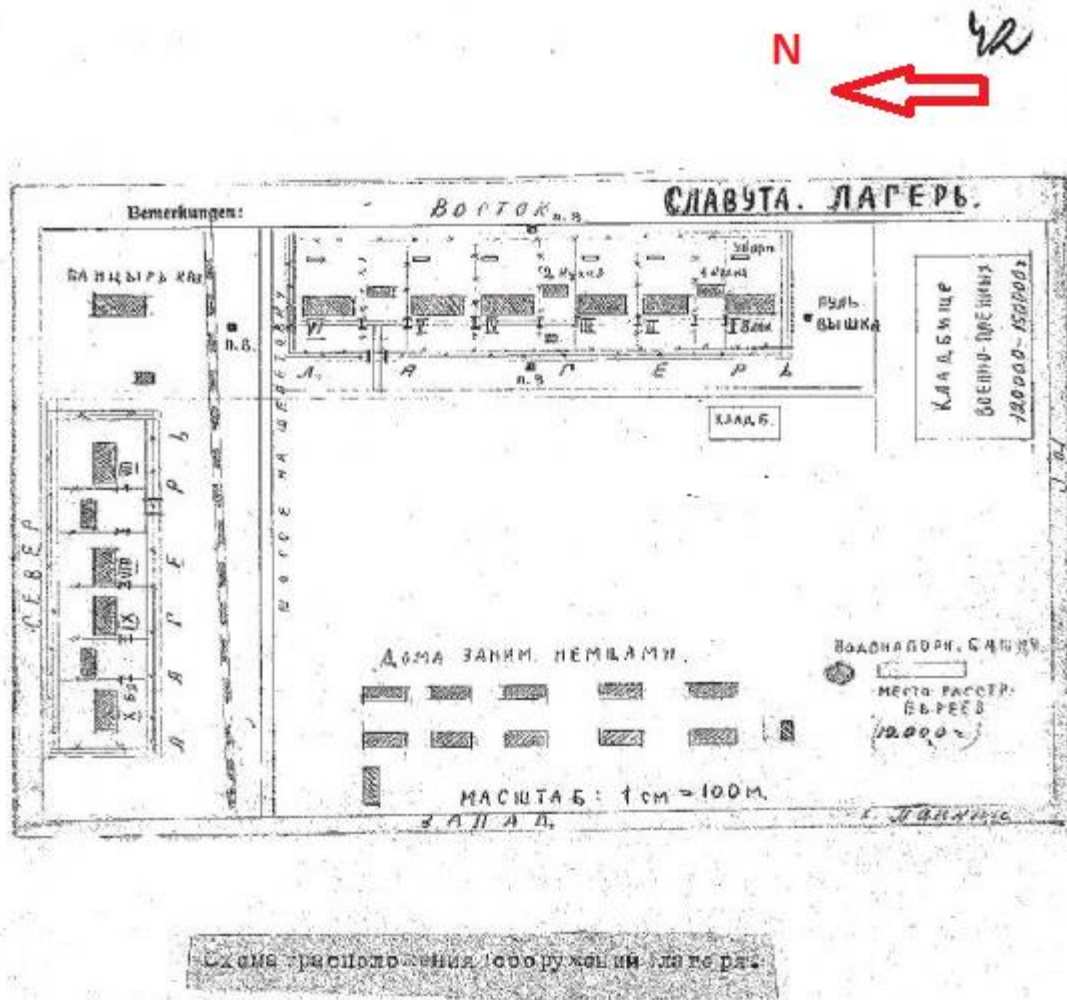


Fig. 6.3. Plan of the PoW camp in Slavuta in 1944 (scale 1: 10,000): Slavuta in *The Untold stories* (web page).

Cellars of barracks were converted into punishment cells, mostly for keeping Jewish inmates before execution (see Plate 6.4).<sup>669</sup> In addition, tortures for the identification of political officers and members of the Communists Party also took place in those cells.<sup>670</sup> The Red Army experts also stated, after surveying the camp, that some of the cellars were converted into clothing storage (removed from inmates).<sup>671</sup>

<sup>669</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 445.

<sup>670</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 165 [Testimony of I. Khuazhev](#).

<sup>671</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.799, p. 21 [Report about the camp survey, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1944.](#)



*Plate 6.4. The punishment cells in one of the barracks, 1944.*<sup>672</sup>

Another important purpose of these facilities was a morgue or storage for cadavers (mertvetskaya). The lack of space in the morgue caused corpses to be stacked by barrack 2 before burying at the camp cemetery.<sup>673</sup> The location of the morgue or store for cadavers was also confirmed by surveys in the camp territory in January 1944. The dead bodies of 45 inmates were found in the cellar of barrack 2 (see Plate 6. 5.).<sup>674</sup>

<sup>672</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 91.

<sup>673</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 238, p.64 *Interrogation of Aleksashenko*; YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 4, 46, 142, 170 *Testimonies of I. Belyi, N. Zhdanov, G. Sayenko, Ye. Chigrin.*

<sup>674</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 32 *Testimony of A. Vopershuk*; YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.2, p.24 *Minutes of the camp survey, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944.*



Plate. 6. 5. Remains of 45 prisoners of Grosslazarett were found in the cellar of barrack II in January 1944.<sup>675</sup>

It is possible that more than one storage existed in the camp because some surviving inmates described the morgue as a shed (Fig. 6.4.).<sup>676</sup>

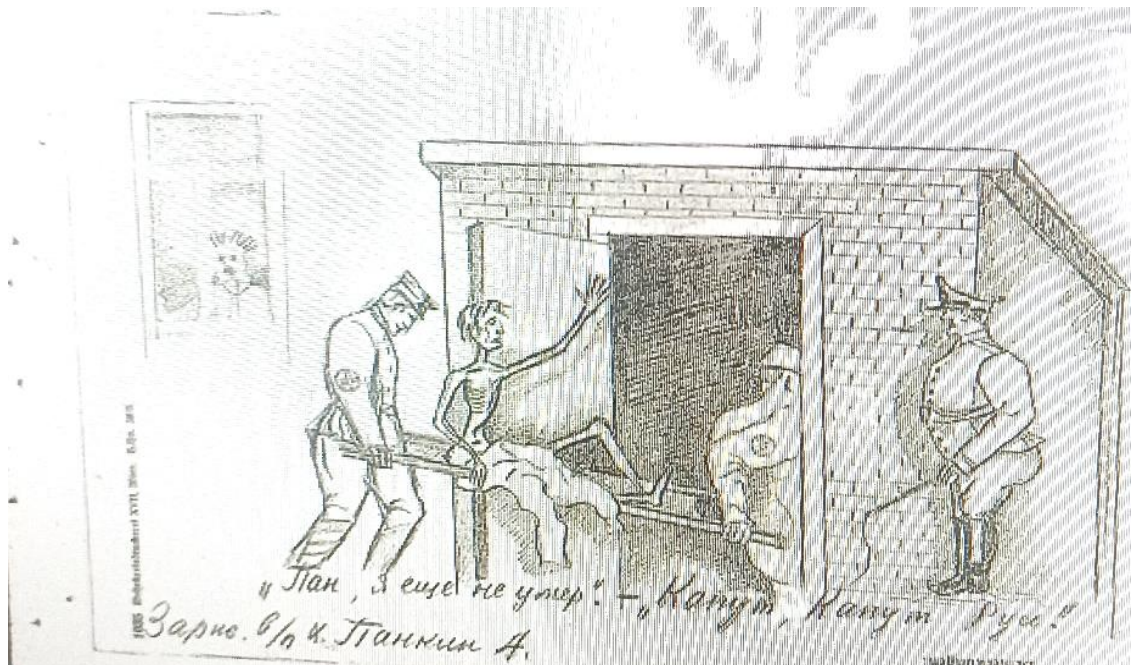


Fig. 6.4. A shed for cadavers, drawing by former PoW Aleksei Pankin: YVA M.33/f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.799, p. 52.

<sup>675</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 107.

<sup>676</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 46, 91 [Testimonies of N. Zhdanov, N. Likhariov](#).

### 6.3. Killing and burial sites<sup>677</sup>

Much of what we can find out about the killing and burial sites in Slavuta PoW camps comes from the exhumation reports of investigations undertaken in 1944. It seems the first exhumations occurred in January 1944.<sup>678</sup> The soldiers of the Red Army excavated one of the mass graves at the PoW cemetery on 31st January 1944.<sup>679</sup> This excavation showed that 30 cadavers were buried instead of the nine people mentioned on the wooden cross above it. The main survey of the area was completed by the Extraordinary Commission in April 1944 (the general details of which were already described in Chapter 5). During this investigation, four burial sites were identified within the camp area: *Object 5*, *Object 2*, *Object 3* and *Object 1* (see Fig. 6.5. and Fig. 6.6.).

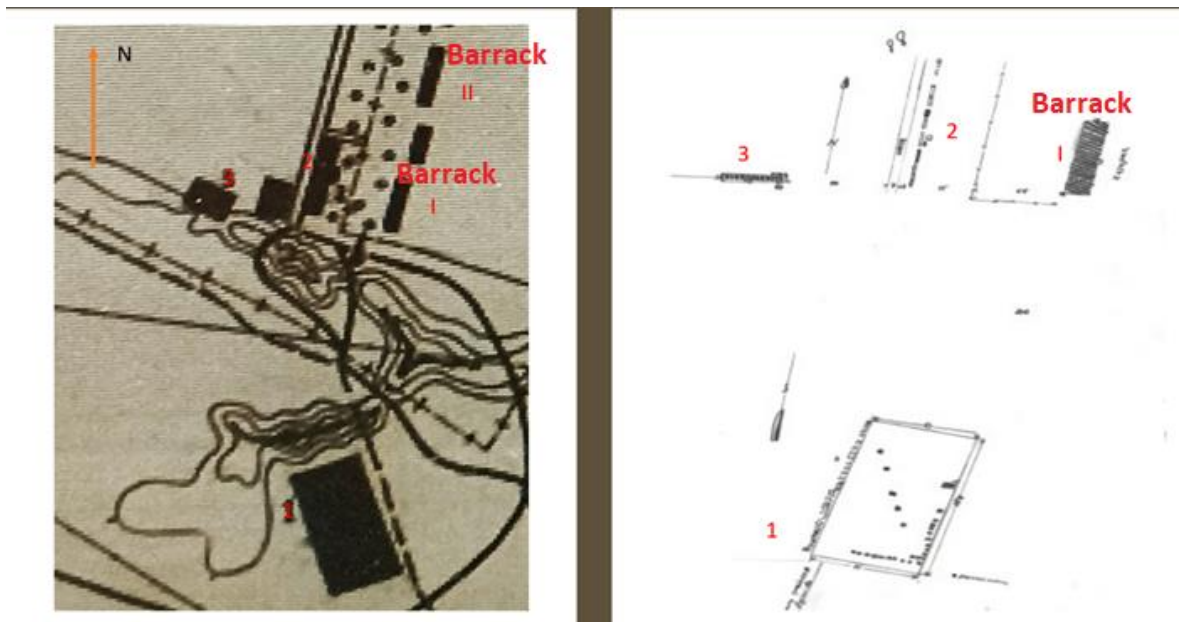


Fig. 6. 5. Plan of locations for Object 1, Object 2 and Object 3 drawn by the members of the Extraordinary Commission in April 1944 (left - author unknown, right – author technician Kravchenko). I – barrack 1, II – barrack 2. <sup>680</sup>.

<sup>677</sup> NB: the description of burial sites is given in chronological order (from the earliest to the more recent). In addition, the author used the names of locations given by the Extraordinary Commission. In this context the word *Object* comes from the original Extraordinary Commission report. Some of the meanings of this word in Russian is facility, site, or location.

<sup>678</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 16 [Act of survey of the camp area, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1944](#). More details about the Soviet investigations in Slavuta was given in Chapter 5.

<sup>679</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.799, p. 23 [Report about the camp survey, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1944..](#)

<sup>680</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, pp. 67 and 88.

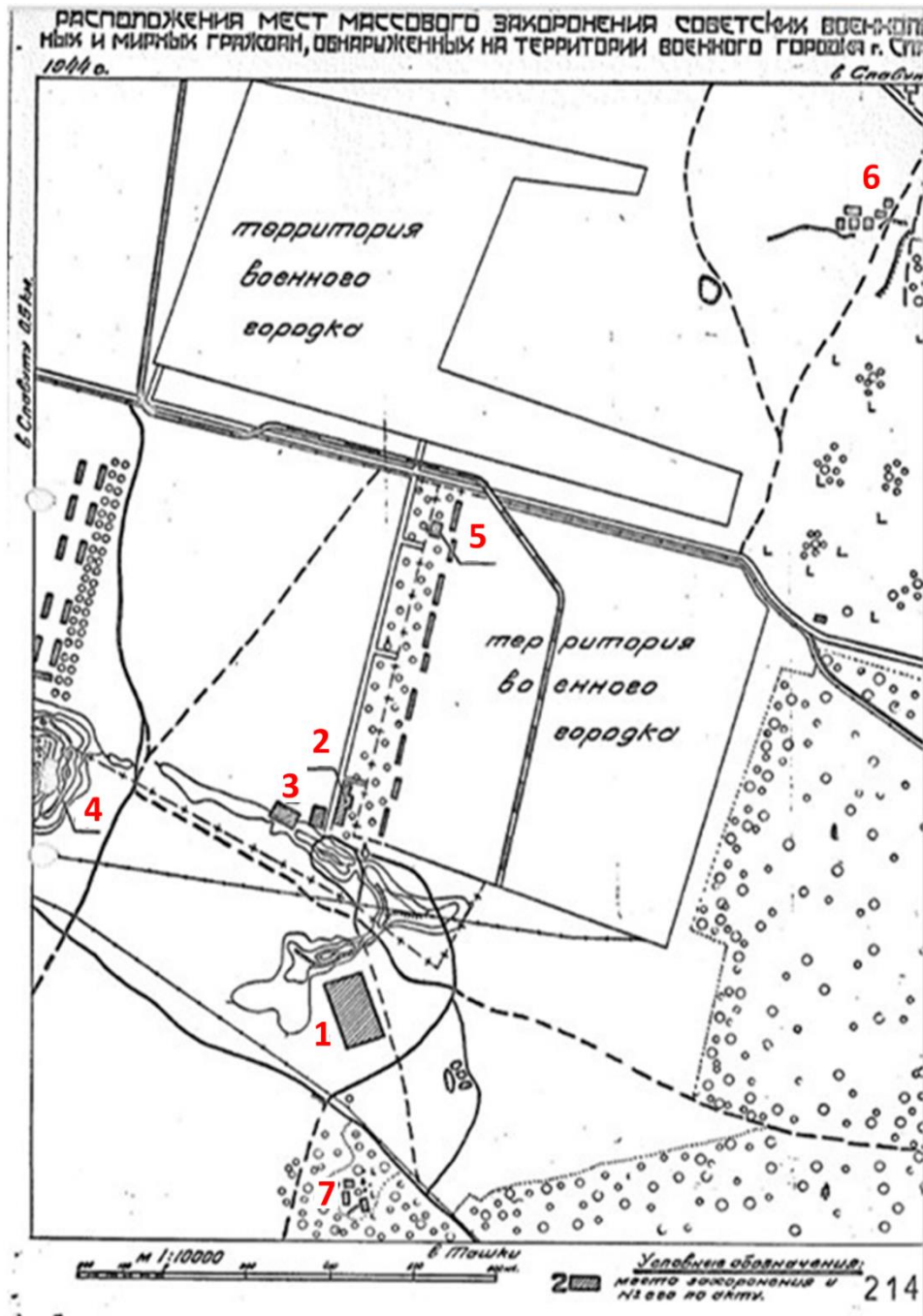


Fig. 6.6. Plan of burial site location created by the Extraordinary Commission in April 1944: (1) the main PoW cemetery; (2) and (3) mass graves near barrack 1; (4) Jewish mass graves near the Water Tower; (5) burial sites near the hospital barrack; (6) possibly the mass graves of the first Jewish victims of the Nazis in Slavuta.<sup>681</sup>

<sup>681</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 214 Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.



### *Object 5*

According to former camp worker Saienko, the first burial site for dead inmates of Slavuta was near barracks 5 and 6 (see Fig. 6.3. and Fig. 6.8.).<sup>682</sup> Later, this area, for some reason, was camouflaged and grave mounds were demolished. Trees were planted and a fence and benches were constructed. Former camp cleaner Slavinskaya stated that the first executions in Slavuta started in the summer of 1941 (in groups of 10-20 people), but without geographical reference. She also recalled that PoWs took cadavers out to the cemetery (unlocated) using coaches in 1941.<sup>683</sup> The excavation conducted by the Extraordinary Commission members in April 1944 of the area near barracks 5 and 6 confirmed the statement of eyewitnesses about some graves existing there. A mass grave with no grave mound was identified measuring 4.5 m x 3 m with human remains at a depth of 0.3m from the surface.<sup>684</sup> During the excavation, fully skeletalised disarticulated human remains were identified as well as fragments of decayed fabric and the remains of leather boots with foot bones inside.<sup>685</sup> All of the remains within the mass grave appeared chaotic in placement, suggesting this was either a secondary burial (e.g., the remains were moved from the original grave) or that this grave was badly disturbed, perhaps during the process of camouflaging the area.<sup>686</sup> No remains from this site were taken for medical examination.<sup>687</sup> This was perhaps due to the state of decay of the remains or because the key purpose of the excavation was to confirm the existence of mass graves in that part of the camp. Given the sparse information that is available, no other conclusions can be reached and it is clear from the analysis of the Extraordinary Commission records that there is the potential to re-investigate this site.

### *Objects 2 and 3*

It seems *Objects 2 and 3* were a single cemetery initially. According to the earliest survey of the camp territory (February 1944), people who conducted this survey (the Red Army officers, locals and former camp inmates) recorded that the cemetery (visible graves) was

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<sup>682</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 140 [Testimony of G. Sayenko](#).

<sup>683</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 148 [Testimony of E. Slavianskaya](#).

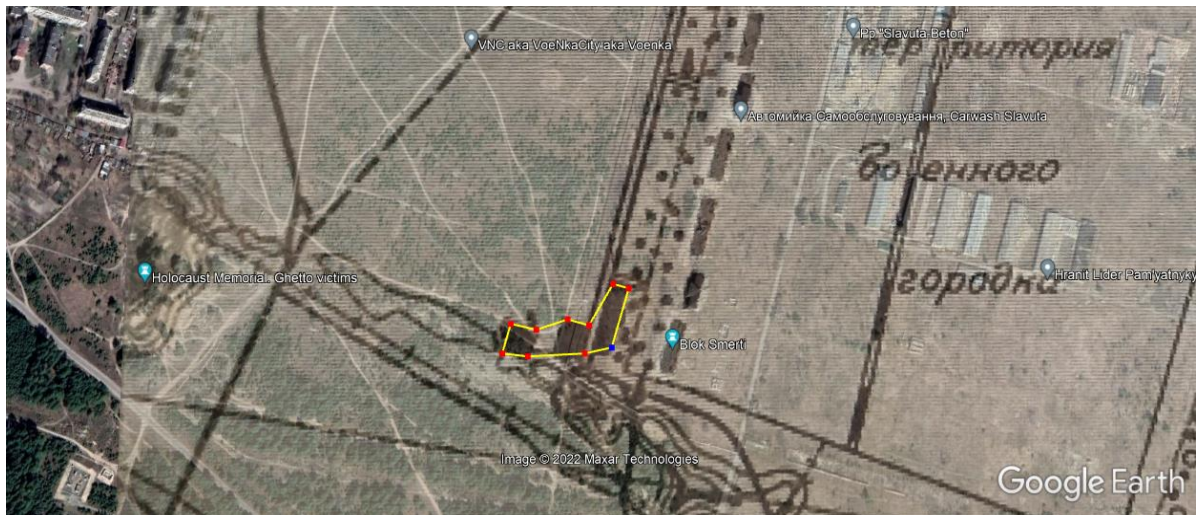
<sup>684</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899 [Exhumation minutes](#).

<sup>685</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 78 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#).

<sup>686</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 78 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#).

<sup>687</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 78 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#).

located in the front of barrack 1 and was about 0.5 ha.<sup>688</sup> One of the participants of this survey stated that a camp cemetery was located in the north (SIC) of barrack 1, and there were located 10 large mass graves (perhaps *Object 2*) and about 30 individual graves (perhaps *Object 3*)(see Fig. 6.7.).<sup>689</sup> Some of the discovered mass and individual graves were marked (with grave mounds or/and wooden crosses), and some were unmarked.<sup>690</sup>



*Fig. 6.7. Location of Objects 2 and 3 (the second camp cemetery) (yellow line) overlaid on Google Earth map.*

As already mentioned in the section above, the maximum death toll was in barracks 1 and 2. One of the former PoW, Valiaiev, stated that dead inmates from this barrack were thrown down through windows.<sup>691</sup> Moreover, the camp morgue and place for storage of dead bodies were located in and near barrack 2. Therefore, it is possible that this area was selected as a cemetery so that the exhausted inmates who were on burial duty did not have to take them far.

<sup>688</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.2, p. 22.

<sup>689</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 29 **Testimony of A. Voitseshuk**. NB: Objects 2 and 3 were located on the west of barrack 1.

<sup>690</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 29 **Testimony of A. Voitseshuk**.

<sup>691</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 18 **Testimony of S Valiayev**.

*Object 2*

*Plate 6.6. View of Object 2 and barracks I, II, III in April 1944.*<sup>692</sup>

In April 1944, the Extraordinary Commission identified 11 mass graves to the west of barrack 1 (See Plate 6.6.).<sup>693</sup>

No of grave	Grave dimensions	Corpses taken for medical examination (visual examination, not full autopsy)
1	11 x 1.8 m	
2	9 x 1.5 m	
3	7 x 2 m; depth at which remains appeared: 1 m.	20 corpses and three skulls
4	10 x 2 m	
5	3.5 x 3.5 m (closer to barrack 1)	
6	3 x 1 m (pit with no mound, dimensions taken by the pit	10 corpses

<sup>692</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 109.

<sup>693</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 74 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#). A mistake was made in the text, there were said nine instead eleven mass graves.

	contours); depth at which remains appeared: 1 m.	
7	14 x 1.5 m	
8	14 x 1.5 m; depth at which remains appeared: 1 m.	30 corpses and 39 skulls
9	6 x 1.5 m	
10	8 x 1.5 m	
11	5 x 1.8 m	

*Table 6.1. Measurements of the mass graves at Object 2 and information on how many human remains were taken for medical examination from there.<sup>694</sup>*

As shown in Table 6.1, exhumation was conducted on three mass graves (See Fig. 6.8.). Based on the state of human remains, medical experts stated that mass grave 3 was the oldest among the excavated mass graves at the *Object 2* location.<sup>695</sup> In all three excavated graves, the corpses were disarticulated.

<sup>694</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 74 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>695</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 74 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

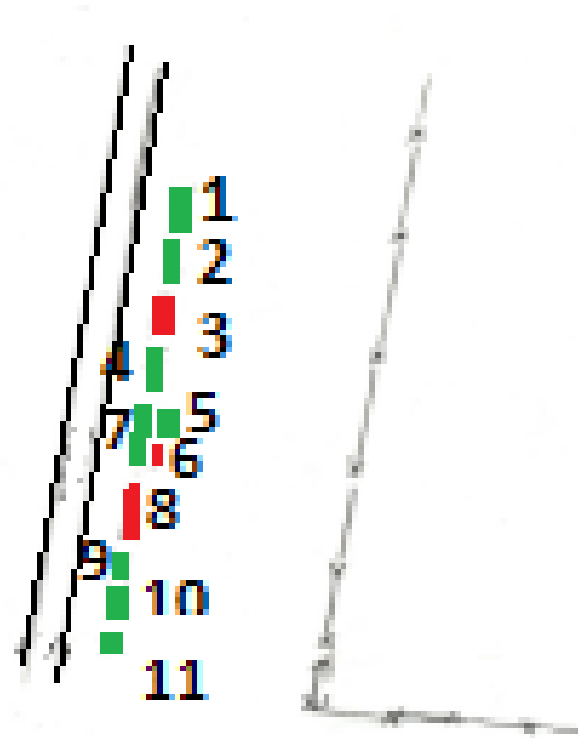


Fig. 6.8. Mass graves (Object 2): (green) unexcavated and (red) excavated.

*Mass grave 3:* the Extraordinary Commission only excavated part of mass grave 3 (3m x 3m). According to exhumation minutes, human remains were found in an advanced stage of decomposition (some soft tissues and organs still could be distinguished, but mostly cadavers had already been skeletonised). Most of the corpses were undressed, but some decayed clothing was present.<sup>696</sup> Due to the fact that complete excavation was not carried out, it was impossible to determine the exact number of individuals in this mass grave. Based on the conclusions of medical experts after visual inspections, the victims did not have any injuries or traumas on their skulls, but all of them had traces of exhaustion and starvation.<sup>697</sup>

*Mass grave 6:* this mass grave was unmarked, and the dimensions were bigger than the visible edges of the mass grave on the surface (3.5m x 2 m).<sup>698</sup> All 10 cadavers selected for medical examination had traces of exhaustion and starvation.<sup>699</sup> Four corpses had some

<sup>696</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 69 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 588-610 from grave 3.](#)

<sup>697</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 69 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 588-610 from grave 3.](#)

<sup>698</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 70 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 611-620 from grave 6.](#)

<sup>699</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 70 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 611-620 from grave 6.](#)

additional injuries or traumas in the form of closed and open fractures of the upper and lower limbs.<sup>700</sup> In addition, two cadavers were in underwear only (one of them was buried in a shroud or blanket); two were in civilian gowns, and one had a mix of civilian and military clothes (greatcoat, *gymnastiorka* – military smock).<sup>701</sup> During the exhumation, the Extraordinary Commission experts found at least two dated documents and one undated: (1) a cardboard note with the name of Oleiniuk - 1535 and date 21<sup>st</sup> December 1941 (possible camp inmates ID) and (2) a secondment ID issued to Shleiev on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1943, (3) passport of Satun.<sup>702</sup> The date of August 1943 suggests that burial most likely took place after this date. Likewise, as some of the remains were found in multiple layers of clothes, it is probably that the deposition of the bodies took place during the cold season, i.e. one cadaver wore two jackets, a shirt, three long jones, trousers, and footwraps.<sup>703</sup> Moreover, all examined cadavers were in the same stage of decomposition, which suggests that their burial occurred simultaneously.<sup>704</sup>

*Mass grave 8:* this mass grave was multi-layered and shall be described as 8a and 8b. Mass grave layer 8a was located in the north part of the grid at a depth of around 1 m. The human remains were in the same state of decomposition as mass grave 6.<sup>705</sup> Artefacts in the grave included: a cardboard note with the name of Gerasimenko 1145<sup>706</sup> and a passport of Gordeichuk (YoB 1872).<sup>707</sup> One cadaver had a document with name and date on it (certificate issued to Asauliak on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1943 in Vinogradovka village) and a plywood

<sup>700</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 70-71 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 611-620 from grave 6](#).

<sup>701</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 70-71 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 611-620 from grave 6](#). NB: Here it should be mentioned that many civilian men from only just liberated territories of Ukraine were immediately conscripted in the Red Army. Untrained people in the Red Army, also known as *black jackets* (black infantry), were killed or captured in the first battle mostly. The name “black jackets” appeared because most of them were unable to even receive a military uniform and died or were captured in their civilian clothes.

<sup>702</sup> YVA 7021-64-899, p. 70 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 611-620 from grave 6](#). NB: According to OBD Memorial, Pavel Sheliaiev died in December 1943 and was buried in Korosten’ (Zhytomyr region): OBD Memorial: Pavel Sheliaiev Available at: <https://obd-memorial.ru/html/info.htm?id=62818690>. (Accessed 20 August 2019). Possibly, another inmate used his ID.

<sup>703</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 70 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 611-620 from grave 6](#).

<sup>704</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 70-71 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 611-620 from grave 6](#).

<sup>705</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 72 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8](#).

<sup>706</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 72 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8](#).

<sup>707</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 73 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8](#): perhaps, Gordeichuk was a civilian because he wore civilian clothes and his age was about 72-73 years old at the moment of death.

plaque with N 55788 on the left pocket of a military shirt (possible camp number).<sup>708</sup> Records show that 30 cadavers were exhumed for medical examination from this layer of the burial.<sup>709</sup> All exhumed remains were dressed - some in civilian clothes and some in pieces of military uniform. At least seven corpses wore one or two pieces of German uniform.<sup>710</sup> Only three cadavers had skeletal traumas (open bone fractures of lower limbs).<sup>711</sup> All cadavers had traces of starvation.<sup>712</sup>

*Mass grave layer 8b* was present in the northern part of the mass grave beneath layer 8a, and therefore represents an earlier burial event. The two layers were divided by 0.20m of soil. To the south, this layer extended to a depth of 1.3m.<sup>713</sup> The medical experts found separate bones and skulls (human remains were completely skeletonised). 29 human skulls were exhumed from this layer for medical examination (visual). No traumas were identified.<sup>714</sup>

Geologically, all of the mass graves at *Object 2* were excavated through a mix of sand and clay that was dry at shallow depths, but was progressively wetter at depth.<sup>715</sup> Based on this, if body depositions at each grave site were made at the same time, then the stage of decomposition should be similar in all three mass graves. But, as was already discussed in chapter 5, many factors impact the speed of decomposition. No traces of adipocere formation were recorded here, in contrast with the mass graves near the Water Tower.

The state of the exhumed human remains and the documents that were found in the graves means that one might assume that most of the burials at *Object 2* was made in the second

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<sup>708</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 72-73 **Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8**. NB: According to OBD Memorial: Makar Asauliak was born in Vinogradovka village (Kazakhstan USSR) and disappeared without traces in August 1943 in the Kursk region: OBD Memorial: Available at: Makar Asauliak <https://obd-memorial.ru/html/info.htm?id=3382252>. (Accessed 20 August 2019).

<sup>709</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 72 **Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8**.

<sup>710</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 72-73 **Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8**. NB: That could be explained by the fact that many PoWs were captured during the warm time of year and had only summer uniforms. Pieces of German uniform evidenced that camp inmates could receive some clothes or trade/exchange them. It is impossible to exclude the possibility that some camp personnel (former PoWs) were buried in the same grave with inmates.

<sup>711</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 72 **Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8**. NB: According to the Final Report (Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 75 **Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944**), four cadavers had skeletal traumas recorded by forensic experts.

<sup>712</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 75 **Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944**.

<sup>713</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 72 **Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8**.

<sup>714</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 72 **Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8**.

<sup>715</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 69 – 73 **Exhumation minutes of bodies 621-689 from grave 8**.

half of 1943. However, the existence of a deeper layer ( *layer 8b*) in mass grave 8 suggests multiple deposition events. Possibly, the earliest burials of PoW inmates have not been limited only to areas near barracks 5 and 6 (see *Object 5* above). Unfortunately, the information provided by Soviet forensics is not enough for a comprehensive analysis of those.

### *Object 3*

*Object 3* was located 92m from *Object 2* in the westerly direction (see Fig.6.5.). The Soviet investigators recorded 44 graves with grave mounds (two rows with 21 graves in each and the third row with two graves). Two empty ditches were found next to the two graves in the third row.<sup>716</sup> The measurements of the mounds were 0.8m x 1.5m, but the pits themselves were slightly bigger: 1.5m x 2m.<sup>717</sup> Grave mounds were covered by low vegetation.<sup>718</sup> The Extraordinary Commission expert assumed that there was a cemetery with individual graves. However, during the excavation of two graves (mass graves 2 and 7, according to Exhumation minutes), 14 cadavers from each were exhumed.<sup>719</sup> All the remains in both mass graves were positioned chaotically at a depth of 1.3m.<sup>720</sup> All exhumed corpses were in the advanced stages of decomposition.<sup>721</sup> Despite decomposition, forensics found some traces of medical treatment (e.g. cotton bandages, dressings, wire splints, and possible surgical wounds).<sup>722</sup> All cadavers had traces of starvation (thin adipose tissue layer) and some of them had trauma of the limbs.<sup>723</sup> Most cadavers were naked, and only a few had remains of underwear.<sup>724</sup> Only one cadaver wore a piece of military uniform (military shirt).<sup>725</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 75 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>717</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 75 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>718</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 75 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>719</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 74 and 75 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 690-703 from grave 2 and](#)

<sup>720</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 75 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>721</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 74 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 690-703 from grave 2.](#)

<sup>722</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 74-75 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 704 -717 from grave 70.](#)

<sup>723</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, pp. 74-75 [Exhumation minutes of bodies 690-703 from grave 2 and 704 -717 from grave 70.](#)

<sup>724</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 75 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.](#)

<sup>725</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899, p. 75 [Exhumation minutes of bodies and 704 -717 from grave 70](#)



*Object 1 (the "main" camp cemetery)*

This cemetery was located to the south of barrack 1 and to the east of the Water Tower. The Extraordinary Commission identified 643 mass graves with six wooden crosses above some of them (three had dates (possible date of burying): 19<sup>th</sup> November 1943; 20<sup>th</sup> November 1943; 21<sup>st</sup> November 1943; see Plate 6.7.).<sup>726</sup> According to the eyewitness testimonies, the first burials there appeared in 1942.<sup>727</sup> The last execution and burial there occurred on 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> January 1944 (see more details in section 6.5.1.).<sup>728</sup> A full forensic autopsy was conducted on only 111 cadavers from *Object 1*.<sup>729</sup> The results of the autopsy recorded more precise causes of death and a diversity of diseases, i.e. abscess of lungs, heart disease, catarrhal pneumonia, pleuritis, tuberculosis, typhoid, ulcer and diphtheroid colitis, typical for dysentery with associated starvation, and cases when the type of infectious disease was not established. In addition, many examined cadavers had various skeletal traumas, e.g. firearm-related injuries (war-related traumas), skull and brain injuries, and missile and shrapnel traumas, and amputations of limbs (surgical and traumatic). Most of the corpses had remains of bandages and splints, either wire or wooden (see Plate 6.8.).<sup>730</sup> The rest of the 900 exhumed cadavers from *Objects 1,2,3 and 5* were examined only with a partial autopsy (visual search of traumas and wounds and examination of the respiratory system).<sup>731</sup>

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<sup>726</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 70 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#). In addition, some wooden crosses were with the list of surnames (possible names of victims), but the exhumation showed that the number of buried people was large than the numbers in the list.

<sup>727</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 140 [Testimony of G. Sayenko](#).

<sup>728</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 82 [Testimony of A. Krishtop](#).

<sup>729</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1963) p. 258.

<sup>730</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, pp. 71-72 [Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944](#).

<sup>731</sup> Sapozhnikov, Yu. (1963) p. 258: NB: only the respiratory system was examined in order to confirm the existence of cases when victims were buried alive. According to Sapozhnikov, the appearance of small fractures of sand in the segmental bronchus and bronchioles was evidence that an individual was still breathing after burying. At least four examined remains were recognised as buried alive.



*Plate 6.7. Eastern part of Object 1, April 1944.<sup>732</sup>*



*Plate 6.8. A cadaver with a splint on his left leg (exhumed from a grave at Object 1), April 1944.<sup>733</sup>*

This cemetery is well preserved and maintained in contrast with other discovered burial sites (see Plate 6.9.). For this reason, the lesser-known cemeteries and mass graves are described more in this thesis.

<sup>732</sup> TsDAKFFD 1-25-18-0-160425-1

<sup>733</sup> TsDAKFFD 1-25-18-0-160423 -2



*Plate 6.9. The main camp cemetery (object 1) in May 2019.*

#### **6.4. The results of archaeological fieldwork in 2019**

##### **6.4.1. Aims, methodology and sites conditions**

Based on the hypothesis that the territory of *Objects 2* and *3* was larger than the area investigated by the Extraordinary Commission members in 1944, the decision was made to survey the area between *Objects 2* and *3* - located to the west of the remains of the barrack *1* and to the northwest of *Object 1* (Fig. 6.8.). After consideration, the methods chosen for these field investigations were the Forensic Walkover Survey, Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), and Global Positioning System Survey (the details of which are provided in Chapter 3).



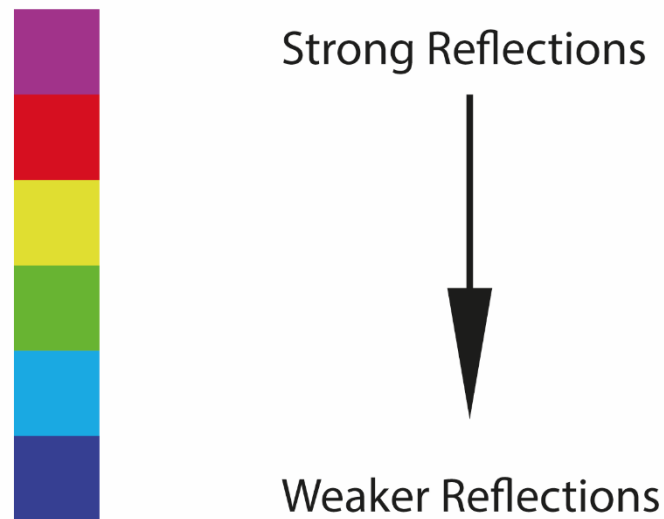
*Plate. 6.10. The general view of the surveyed area.*

Due to trees located on the site, it was not possible to survey a fully complete rectangle. The maximum length of the grid was 30m, and the maximum width of the grid was 60m. Accounting for the section which could not be surveyed, the total area covered by the GPR was 1,800 sq m (Plate 6.10.).



*Fig. 6.9. The bird's view of the surveyed area: (A) the remains of barrack 1; (B) the white sub-rectangular grid 1 location (grid edges collected by Leica Zeno); (C) the main camp cemetery (Object 1) and contemporary memorial.*

A parallel survey methodology with a 0.5m traverse interval was adopted for grid 1 to ensure the greatest coverage within the small defined area. Survey lines were placed from north to south. According to information derived from archival documents (see sections 6.3.2. and 6.3.3.), in combination with the results of walkover surveying, the soil in this area appeared to have a high clay content, which made it highly reflective (see Fig. 6.10.).



*Fig. 6.10. The colour interpretation of the radio spectrum applied for the survey on grid 1.*

For the survey at this location, the same settings were applied as for grid 2b (see section 5.5.): the number of gain points chosen was 4, and the dielectric constant was set as 8. This value corresponds to wet clay. It is important to note that a similar issue was already introduced in the previous chapter. The clay had the effect of creating "background noise" in the data, which made the identification and nature of features more difficult. Due to this fact, only the most recognisable features are analysed in this section.

A further issue existed in the form of a raised slope located on the southern side of grid 1 (see Fig. 6.11.). This area was also converted into a dump with a lot of various litter. That made the GPR results in this area extremely hard to interpret due to the high number of spurious features, background noise, and high levels of soil disturbances and data reflections from unrelated surface and buried material.



*Fig. 6.11. The GPR grid location overlaid on the Google Earth map with Leica Zeno data (orange data points marked various topographical objects, e.g. fence, electricity line, corners of the survey grid, for creating a digital plan of the site) and the remains of Barrack 1 (black arrow).*

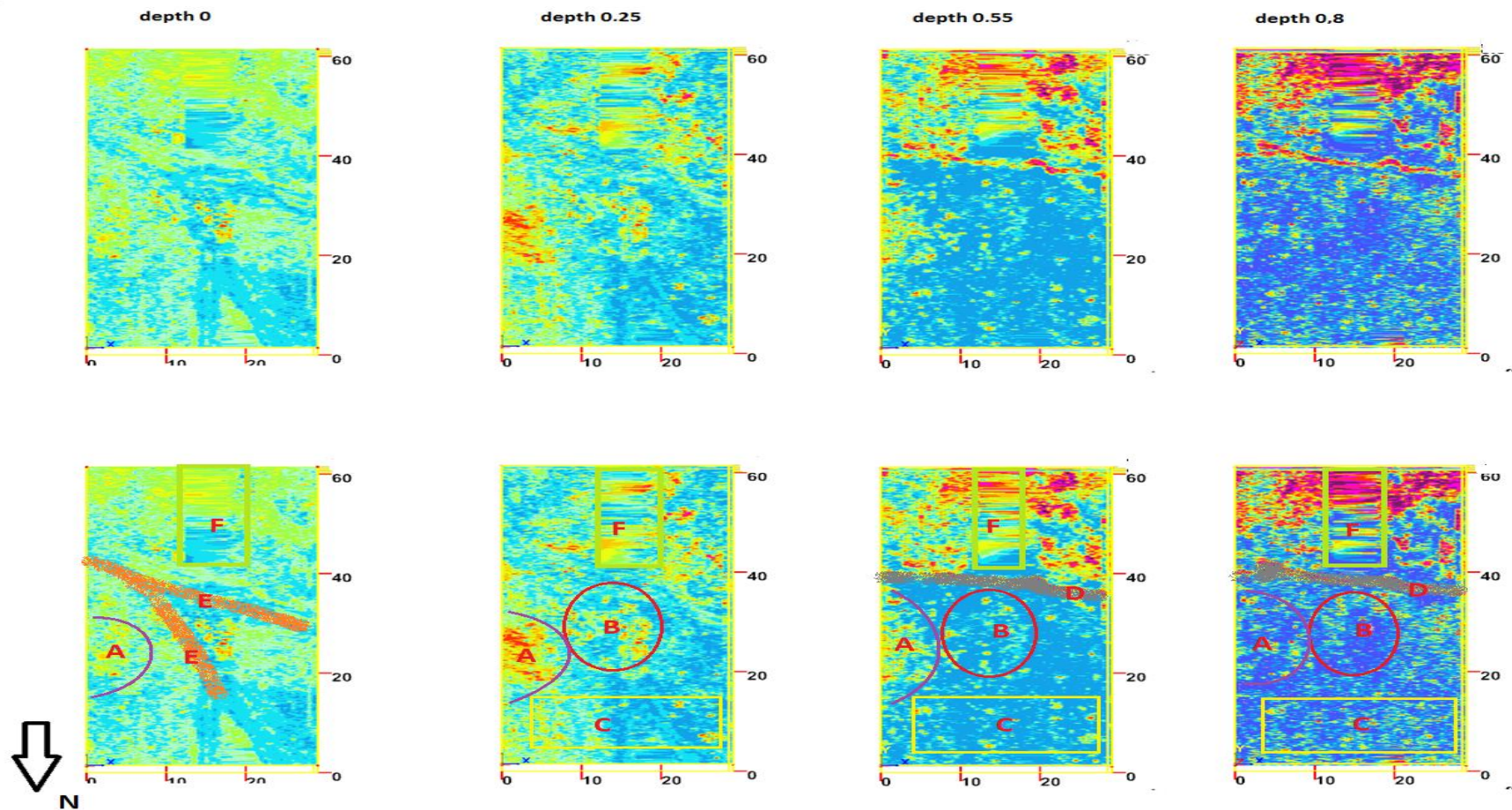


Fig. 6.12. The time-slice GPR data for grid 1 at a depth of 0 m, 0.25 m, 0.55 m, and 0.8 m repeated with interpretations (below): (A) possible mass grave (B) and (C) areas with possible mass and individual burials; (D) possibly a water pipe; (E) tracks; (F) Void data<sup>734</sup>

<sup>734</sup> NB: Here and later, GPR data is presented with several specific processing steps applied in RADAN 7: time zero (this filter set the top of the scan to a close approximation of the ground surface for providing a more accurate depth calculation), background removal (this filter removed some horizontal bands of noise), and test/apply filters (this filter rejected frequencies above and below an established threshold (600 and 100 MHz).)The application of mentioned filters allowed to make features on the GPR data more visible.



### 6.4.2. Results

Several anomalies were identified in the GPR results (see Fig. 6.12. Features and areas A to F, which show the 3D data from four different depths). Most features were visible in both the 2D profiles section lines and the 3D time slices (see Fig. 6.13. and Fig. 6.14.) apart from anomalies within area (Feature) C). Consistently strong GPR reflections are visible at depths 0m, 0.25m and 0.55 m in the eastern part of grid 1 (Feature A; Fig 6.12). Feature A is not visible on the 0.8m depth time slice. To ascertain a more precise depth of this feature, the individual 2D profile (sections) lines were analysed that bisected the pit location (Fig 6.13.). Analysed profiles (the axis lines 0m, 1m and 3m) lines suggest the feature is approximately up to 2.5m deep. According to GPR data, the measurements of the pit are approximately 8m x 10m, but the eastern edge of the feature may extend beneath the concrete fence. Due to this fact, the width of the feature might be larger.

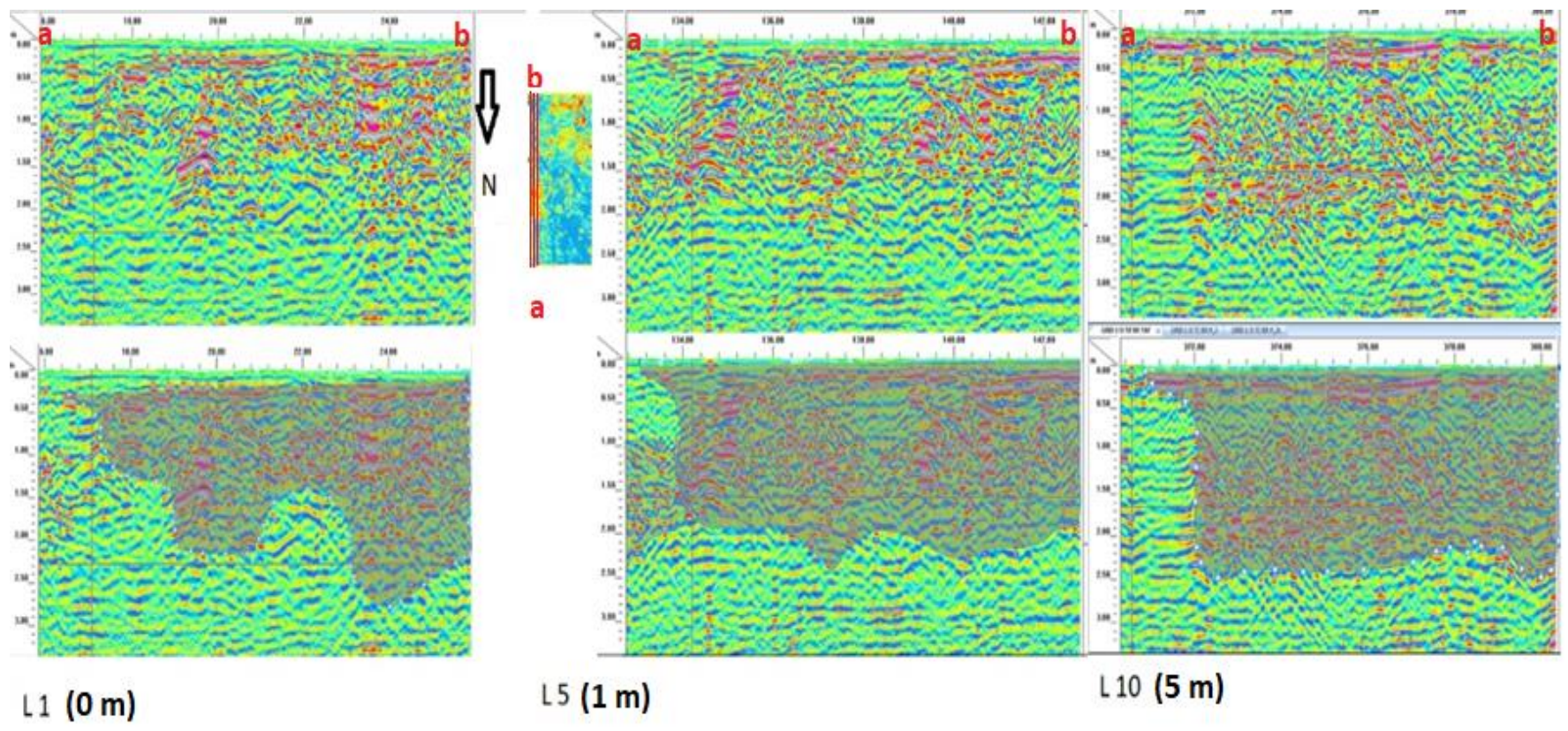


Fig 6.13. Section profile results from survey lines 0 m, 1m and 3 m (top) with annotation (bottom). A profile of anomaly (possible mass grave, Feature A) is visible in the section (grey) with strong reflection. The depth scale is on the left-hand side of each image.

In addition, smaller areas of disturbances were identified in the 3D and 2D profiles across the whole surveyed area. For example, individual disturbances (possible pits) (Feature B) were identified in area (B) (see Fig 6.12.). Fig. 6.14. presented one of these disturbances from survey lines 13.5m and 14m. The measurements of the possible pit are approximately 1.5m x 2m x 2 m.

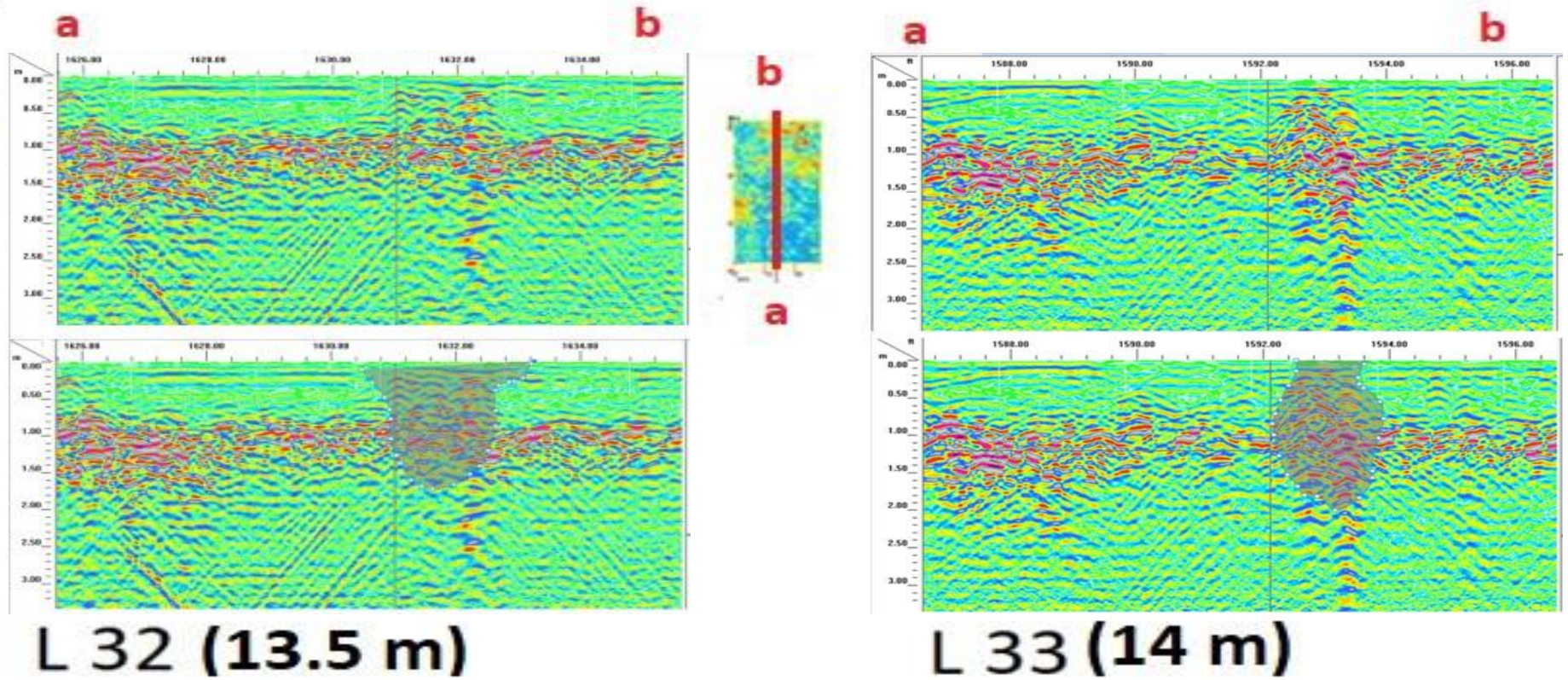


Fig. 6.14. Section profile results from survey axis lines 13.5 m and 14 m (top) with annotation (bottom). A profile of anomaly (possible pit) (Feature B) is visible in the section (grey) with strong reflection. The depth scale is on the left-hand side of each image.

A lot of strong GPR reflections are presented in area (C) (marked as yellow rectangle) in Fig. 6.14. Those anomalies are not visible clearly on 2D profiles, and there is a marked difference between the GPR signals from this and the rest of surveyed area. This area also produced some visible GPR data echo effects, which indicated higher moisture or clay content in the ground as well as the existence of some disturbances of soil from the surface. For correct interpretations, the GPR data results from this and the area outlined above (see Fig. 6.12. area (B) and (C)) further surveys are required.

In addition, another strong reflection is visible at a depth 0.55m and 0.8m in the central part of the grid (closer to the south), and these results are consistent for Feature D (Fig. 6.15.). This feature is clearly visible on all section profiles. The measurements of individual 2D profiles (5m, 9.5m and 21m) suggest that this anomaly appeared at a depth of approximately 0.5m – 0.6 m and disappeared at a depth of 1.6m (see Fig. 6.15.). The left image on Fig. 6.15. (L 048) demonstrated that the material of this feature possible is highly reflective media, e.g. baked clay.

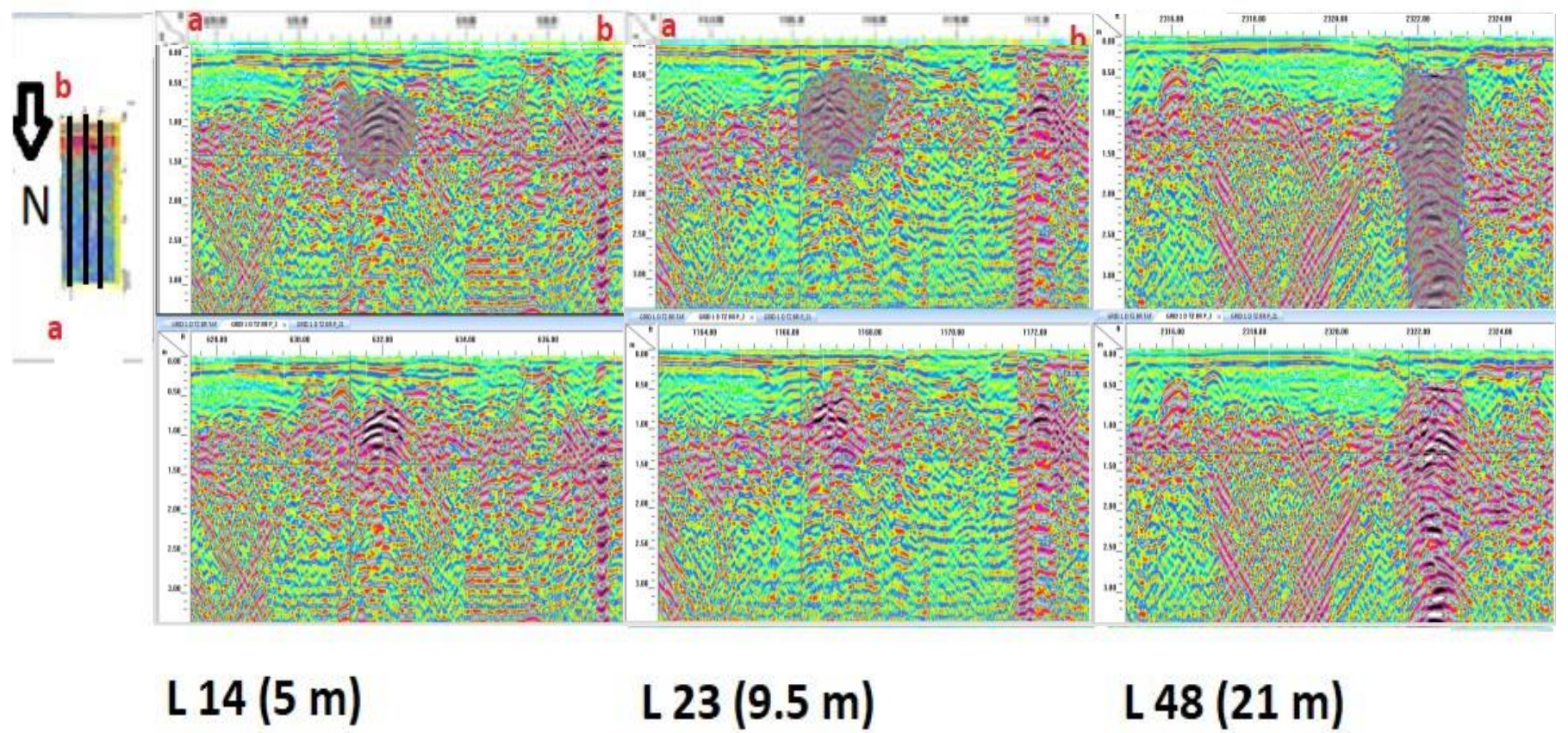


Fig. 6.15. Section profile results from survey axis lines 5 m, 9.5m and 21 m (top) with annotation (bottom). A profile of anomaly (possible a water pipe, Feature D) is visible in the section (grey) with strong reflection. The depth scale is on the left-hand side of each image.

The eastern side was limited by a concrete fence around the former barracks area. Two motor tracks also were located within the surveyed area (see Plate. 6.10.). These tracks were only clearly visible on the time slice of 0 m and on the 2D profiles, indicating that only surface-level disturbance has occurred (see Fig. 6.16.).

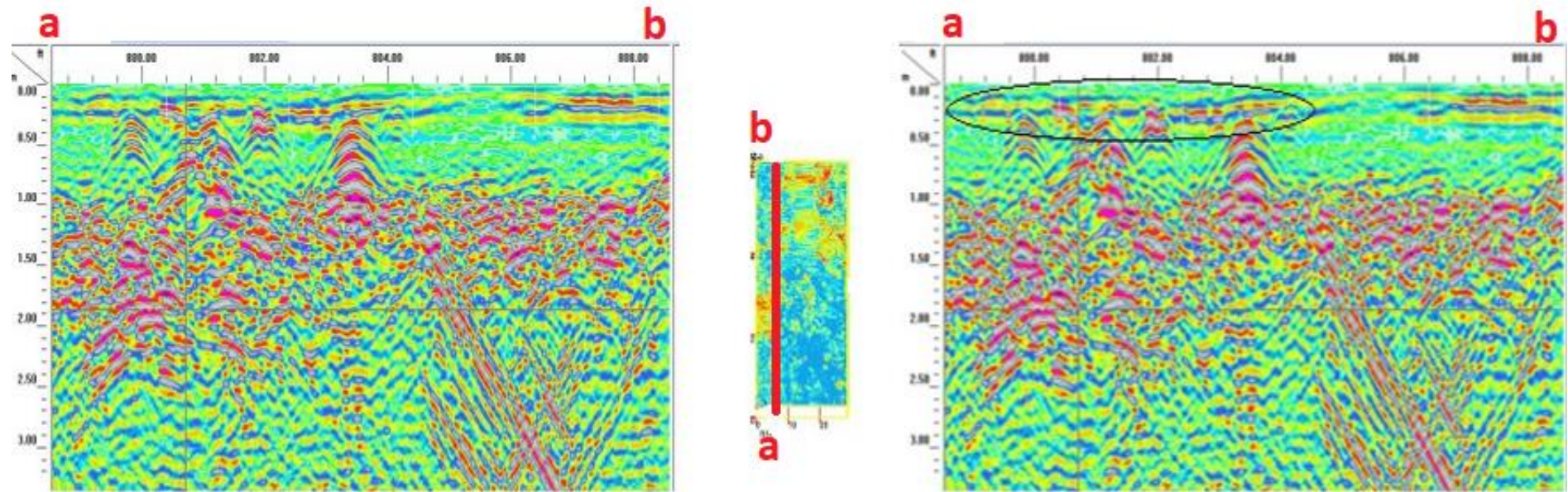


Fig. 6.16. Section profile results from the survey line 6.5 m (left) with annotation (right). A profile of the shallow anomaly (possible track, Features E) at a depth of 0.4 m.



### 6.4.3. Discussion

During archaeological fieldwork undertaken in May 2019 near barrack 1 and the PoW cemetery (grid 1 area), the potential site of at least one mass grave was identified (feature A). This feature, which extended to a depth of 2m, is located between two areas of graves investigated in 1944 (Objects 2 and 3, see Section 6.3). According to eyewitness statements mentioned above, the territory of the cemetery near barracks 1 and 2 might be larger than described in the Report of the Extraordinary Commission in 1944.

Moreover, the results of the GPR survey suggested the existence of more potential burial sites in this location (areas with Features B and C). But only further surveys would provide more information for identifying the nature of those features. However, one more discovered anomaly (Feature A) in this location could be interpreted more accurately. The members of the Extraordinary Commission identified several mass graves within this location (including unmarked burial). Feature A looked similar to an identified possible mass grave near the Water Tower and mass graves in other sites across Ukraine (see Chapter 5). Moreover, the GPR data recorded the disturbance of the soil from the surface, which is one of the markers of a possible mass grave beneath the surface. In addition to the probable graves, infrastructure connected to the Slavuta camp was also located. Feature D appeared consistent with a long trench close to the one which was situated on a virtual line between the Water Tower and the former barrack 1. According to the former worker Shatalov who was present at the Soviet military base at Slavuta before the war, the boundaries of the PoW cemetery near barrack 1 were defined by the trace of a water pipe. It is probable that Feature D is a baked clay water pipe.

### **6.5. People in the camp**

In addition to studying camp topography and searching for accurate locations of burial sites within the campscape of Slavuta, another important question is who was buried there. As a result, this section introduces primary research about the people who were associated with the camp at Slavuta. The section below included information about the main categories of inmates imprisoned in Grosslazaret and who might be buried within Slavuta's campscape. The brief information about various groups of camp prisoners provided in the

following section has not been limited to the description of people who died or were buried in Slavuta but also pointed out who survived there. This is important in order to understand the complexity of the stalag demography and assist with the identification of the deceased. Some groups of prisoners got more chances to be executed immediately after arrival (e.g. Jews or officers), and others got more chances to be liberated (e.g. women or disabled persons). However, some exceptions, as outlined below, occurred.

#### 6.5.1. Categories of inmates/casualties in the camp/related to the camp

*PoWs*: German sources state that 5,000-10,000 PoW inmates could be held simultaneously in Slavuta and 10,000-12,000 in Shepetivka.<sup>735</sup> The first attempt to estimate a possible number of victims was made by the Red Army officers who liberated Slavuta in January 1944: they recorded approximately 20,000-25,000 prisoners simultaneously and up to 120,000 deaths during the war.<sup>736</sup> However, it is likely that the number of inmates in the camp was not permanent and changed over time. Former camp doctor Inozemtsev mentioned that about 8,000 inmates were housed in barracks 1-6, and the total number of inmates in Slavuta was up to 18,000 people simultaneously.<sup>737</sup> It looks realistic that the number of inmates in the camp varied, but usually, about 20,000 inmates were imprisoned there at any given time.

Probably, due to the primary purpose of the camp as a hospital, the biggest category of prisoners was sick or injured. Most of them had already been arriving in Slavuta with traumas or diseases. But the dire conditions in the camp and lack of medical treatment exacerbated their conditions and frequently resulted in the death of inmates. In addition, many inmates mentioned a strange epidemic of an unknown disease called paracholera in the autumn 1942<sup>738</sup>, late spring 1943<sup>739</sup> and June 1943.<sup>740</sup> Inmates assumed that it was some medical experiments conducted by Germans.<sup>741</sup> Possibly, some victims of those epidemics were buried in specific mass graves.

<sup>735</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/8793, p. 5 [Inhaltsverzeichnis Das Kriegsgefangenenwesen](#).

<sup>736</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 1062, p. 166 [The Act of survey of the camp area, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1944](#).

<sup>737</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.67 [Testimony of I. Inozemtsev](#). Unfortunately, he did not mention the exact date in his testimony.

<sup>738</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 46, 81, 169 [Testimonies of N. Zhdanov, A. Krishtop, Ye. Chigrin](#).

<sup>739</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 46 [Testimony of N. Zhdanov](#).

<sup>740</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 19, 68, 166 [Testimonies of S. Valiayev, I. Inozemtsev, I. Khuzhaev](#).

<sup>741</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 81 [Testimony of A. Krishtop..](#)

As was outlined in Section 6.1.1., the treatment of different categories of inmates in stalags might have been different. The most vulnerable groups of victims were Jews and Soviet officers/members of the Communists Party. But as demonstrated above, the categories of Soviet PoWs were not limited to only those groups.

*Jewish PoWs:* As already pointed out, the Jews consisted of a specific group among captured Soviet soldiers. In contrast with the local Jewish community, Jewish PoWs were held within the campscape, perhaps with other inmates, not in the ghetto. Most of the Jewish prisoners were selected, and then they disappeared.<sup>742</sup> It was enough to only suspect an inmate was a Jew, and their fate sealed.<sup>743</sup> The executions of Jewish prisoners were systematic and public. Germans forced their victims to dance and sing at the edge of the grave and even kiss a rifle barrel. Other inmates witnessed those executions.<sup>744</sup> According to former inmate Kniazev, dozens of Jewish medics were shot in Slavuta in December 1942.<sup>745</sup> Another incident could not be dated, but according to a former camp worker, four Jewish doctors were taken allegedly for quarantine, but after 5-8 days, they were shot within the camp area.<sup>746</sup> Possibly, the Jewish PoWs were executed near or at the camp cemeteries. So far, no information about surviving Jewish inmates of Slavuta is available for the author.<sup>747</sup>

*Soviet officers and communists:* the traditional perception of the Soviet officers and communists' fate in the Holocaust study is that those categories were selected from among the rest of PoWs (similarly to Jewish PoWs) and were exterminated soon after capture. But in contrast with Jewish inmates, a small number of officers did manage to survive and were liberated in January 1944<sup>748</sup>. Among them, major Alekseienko (also a member of the Communists Party); Valiayev (political officer, member of the Communists Party); senior

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<sup>742</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp.62, 83, 85, 125 [Testimonies of A. Ivaschenko, A. Krishtop, V. Kuzmin, Ya. Novikov.](#)

<sup>743</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.127 [Testimony of A. Pankin.](#)

<sup>744</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 53 [Act regarding treatment in the camp completed by former inmates.](#)

<sup>745</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 448.

<sup>746</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 100 [Testimony of A. Martynov.](#)

<sup>747</sup> NB: Some Jewish inmates, who spent a short time in Slavuta, managed to survive. Mostly those were Jewish PoWs who were transferred through Slavuta to other camps. It is possible that some prisoners hid their ethnicities. Due to this fact, this statement related mostly to those surviving inmates who the Red Army liberated in 1944.

<sup>748</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.5 [Testimonies.](#)

lieutenant Zhdavov (member of Komsomol); Lzhkariov (member of the Communists Party); colonel Nekrasov (member of the Communists Party); junior lieutenant Nikolaiev (worked in the NKVD, member of the Communists party); Novikov (member of the Communists party); lieutenant Pankin (member of the Communists Party); captain 1<sup>st</sup> rank Filippov (member of the Communists Party); Khniazhev (political officer, member of Communists Party).

Jewish military personnel and Soviet officers could survive in Slavuta only with the assistance of other prisoners. For example, Grigorieva (a Jew) pretended that she was Armenian, and another inmate confirmed it;<sup>749</sup> Colonel Nekrasov was registered in Slavuta as a sergeant, and other prisoners hid him in another barrack when the Germans identified his real rank.<sup>750</sup>

*Combat medics:* Medical personnel in Slavuta who treated the inmates were also PoWs. For example, Smolko saw her husband in December 1942 in Slavuta, and he used to work there as a camp doctor whilst also being an inmate in the camp.<sup>751</sup> Former inmate Inozemtsev (military doctor) was transferred to Slavuta in 1942 because he was injured.<sup>752</sup> Later, he became a camp doctor. Six barracks had their own senior doctors among PoWs medics.<sup>753</sup> It seems one of the duties of medical personnel among the PoWs was to register the number of deaths in their barracks.<sup>754</sup> Based on Streim's information, the total number of medical personnel (including unlicensed assistive personnel) was 883 individuals in 1943.<sup>755</sup> But according to former camp doctor Rodionov, there were not enough medical personnel in the camp.<sup>756</sup> It seems that medical personnel got more chances to survive. It can be explained by the fact that medics had access to resources (e.g. food, and medicine) and did not have to perform hard labour. Likely, medical personnel became responsible if

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<sup>749</sup> YVA O.3. / 6712 [Testimony of Grunia Grigoriev.](#)

<sup>750</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 118 [Testimony of S. Nekrasov.](#)

<sup>751</sup> GDA SBU f. 7/ s. 1, pp. 73-74 [Interrogation of T. Krishtop.](#)

<sup>752</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.64 [Testimony of I. Inozemtsev.](#)

<sup>753</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 278.

<sup>754</sup> E.g. feldsher Degtiariov recorded deaths in barrack 2 from 10 to 30 May 1943 (490 people died) and sent these numbers to camp statisticians: YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 41 [Testimony of V. Degtiariov.](#)

<sup>755</sup> Streim, A. (1981) *Die Behandlung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener im "Fall Barbarossa": eine Dokumentation unter Berücksichtigung der Unterlagen deutscher Strafverfolgungsbehörden und der Materialien der Zentralen Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung von NS-Verbrechen.* Heidelberg - Karlsruhe : Müller, Legal Publishers, p. 164.

<sup>756</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 135 [Testimony of G. Rodionov.](#)

escapes occurred.<sup>757</sup> Former camp doctor Krishtop mentioned that after the escape of 18 prisoners from barrack 2, all personnel from that barrack were taken somewhere. Some of them returned after some absence (no precise information), heavily beaten and exhausted.<sup>758</sup> According to former prisoner Filippov, other people from this group were sent to Germany.<sup>759</sup> Comparatively better living conditions in the camp for medics were neutralised by the permanent danger of being punished for offences of other prisoners. In addition, many of the camp medics were Jews.<sup>760</sup> Due to this fact, the majority of them were killed soon after arrival to Slavuta.

*Women:* Not only male PoWs were imprisoned in Slavuta, but archival sources and eyewitness testimonies demonstrate that some female combatants were held here. About 300 female combat medics (doctors, nurses, unlicensed assistants) arrived in Slavuta in July 1942 after the Battle of Sevastopol.<sup>761</sup> One of them, Molchanova, spent a couple of months in Slavuta but was liberated with other women in September 1942 (see Fig. 6.17.).<sup>762</sup>

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<sup>757</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 125 [Testimony of Ya. Novikov](#).

<sup>758</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.5, p. 69 [Testimony of A. Krishtop](#).

<sup>759</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 158 [Testimony of V. Filippov](#).

<sup>760</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 445.

<sup>761</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 321.

<sup>762</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 112-113 [Testimony of N. Molchanova](#).

1243

Stalag Nr. 301  
Dulag

Slawuta  
Ortungabe

15. Sept. 1942  
Datum

### Entlassungsausweis Nr. 20130/11

Der Kriegsgefangene Moltchanenko, Nadeschda Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
zuletzt vor dem Kriege wohnhaft in Simferopol  
geboren am 10.5.1915  
in Simferopol  
ist aus dem deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlager: Stalag/Dulag Nr. 301  
in Slawuta  
am 16.9.1942 in seine Heimatgemeinde  
Slawuta zum Arbeitsamt  
entlassen worden.  
Entlassungsgrund: gem. Kdr.d.Kgf.b.WBfh.Ukr.Ic Az.13 Nr.1212/42  
v. 28.8.1942

Die Entlassung aus der Kriegsgefangenschaft wird ausgesprochen unter folgenden Bedingungen:

- Der Kgf. hat sich umgehend in seine oben angeführte Heimatgemeinde zu begeben und dabei folgenden Marschweg zu wählen:  
Slawuta

Weicht er von diesem Marschweg ab, so wird er bei Aufgreifen erneut in ein Kgf.-Lager überführt.

- Der Kgf. hat sich bis zum 20. September 1942 bei der dortigen deutschen militärischen Dienststelle, falls nicht vorhanden, beim Bürgermeister zu melden. Der Tag der Meldung ist auf diesem Entlassungsausweis zu bescheinigen.

Nur durch diese Bescheinigung wird der Entlassungsausweis erst ein für den Kgf. gültiger Ausweis, den er ständig bei sich zu führen hat.

Kann der Kgf. aus irgendwelchen Gründen, Erkrankung usw. seine Heimatgemeinde nicht zu dem vorgeschriebenen Zeitpunkt erreichen, so hat er sich in der Zwischenunterkunft bei dem dort zuständigen Bür-

Fig. 6.17. The document about liberation of Nadezhda Molchanova from Stalag 301.<sup>763</sup>

The camp feldsher mentioned that many women were housed with him in barrack 8. A group of 15 female prisoners were selected from there and shot on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1942.<sup>764</sup> It is possible that these women were Jews. At least one female inmate (Plekhanova) was liberated in January 1944.<sup>765</sup> For some reason, the Soviet medical expert did not mark the gender of exhumed individuals in most cases. Based on the Exhumation minutes, only two female corpses were identified among the buried remains (see *Civilians* below), but this number may be much higher in reality in the absence of a detailed anthropological analysis of the victims' remains.

<sup>763</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 7.

<sup>764</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 42 [Testimony of V. Degtiariv](#).

<sup>765</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 53 [Testimony of P. Zhurkovskii](#).

*Former PoWs:* Some captured Soviet soldiers could be liberated from the camp, especially, in the first months of the Nazi-Soviet war. The best chance for PoWs to be released was if they could prove that they were local residents.<sup>766</sup> This practice was applicable to the Slavuta PoW camp. For example Denesiuk requested permission to liberate her husband's brother, Degtiariov, from "Slavuta military prison" in November 1941.<sup>767</sup> Pietrushevskia received permission to liberate her nephew, Stadnik, born in Slavuta, from the Slavuta camp.<sup>768</sup> Former camp translator Zadachina stated that some civilians could arrange a meeting in the camp (perhaps, with inmates) even in March 1943.<sup>769</sup> It seems not all released from the camp former PoWs were real locals. That was a good strategy for surviving, and many of the Red Army soldiers pretended that they used to live in vicinities. After the liberation of Slavuta, several former PoWs mentioned above were interrogated by the Extraordinary Commission members in order to provide more information regarding Nazi crimes in Slavuta.

Some inmates of stalag were liberated due to health conditions, e.g. Bukhtiichuk, former PoW and, later, a shoemaker in Slavuta<sup>770</sup>; Tul'chinskii, former PoW, was liberated in September 1942 because he became disabled.<sup>771</sup> It seems some exhausted or ill prisoners arrived in Slavuta from Germany, e.g. one inmate (Soviet PoW) told Khomich that he was sent to Slavuta from Germany, where he worked at a farm and a mine.<sup>772</sup> Those facts demonstrate that not all inmates died in the camp.

*Civilians:* It was not unusual for civilians, especially males, to be held in the PoW camps together with combatants.<sup>773</sup> The execution of civilians, possibly Jews, in the camp was mentioned in the previous chapter. The execution of non-combatants also occurred at the PoW cemetery.<sup>774</sup> Inmates thought that the purpose of those executions was to intimidate

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<sup>766</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011) pp. 113-114.

<sup>767</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) c 113

<sup>768</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014) c. 117

<sup>769</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 58 [Testimony of L. Zadachina](#).

<sup>770</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 11 [Testimony of T. Biriukov](#).

<sup>771</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 154 [Testimony of M. Tulchinskii](#).

<sup>772</sup> Khomich, I. (1959) *My vernulis'*. Moscow: Voenizdat.

<sup>773</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011) p. 107.

<sup>774</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp.91, 146, 152, 167 [Testimonies of N. Likhariov L. Sevriugin, S. Tarkovskii, I. Khuzhaev](#).

PoWs.<sup>775</sup> However, the documents of the Extraordinary Commission provided very precise information regarding the last execution of 15 civilians (including two women) at the camp cemetery on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1944 (10 days before the liberation).<sup>776</sup> Soviet investigators exhumed the remains of 11 people from mass grave 642 (Object 1).<sup>777</sup> Among them, the remains of Sidorenko were examined and identified by witnesses who knew him.<sup>778</sup> According to the interrogation minutes, Sidorenko and 15 other civilians, including two women, were shot at the camp cemetery.<sup>779</sup>

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<sup>775</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.162 *Testimony of V. Filippov.*

<sup>776</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 13, 82 *Testimonies of A. Bukhtiichuk, A. Krishtop.*

*Biographical note: One of these civilians was Georgii Sidorenko. Georgii was a military pilot imprisoned in Slavuta and had the rank of captain (based on eyewitness testimony). He was born in 1911, was taller than average and had dark hair. In autopsy minutes, Sapozhnikov (forensic expert) named him The Hero of the Soviet Union (the highest title in the Soviet Union), but this information is also unconfirmed. He was liberated from the camp due to his health condition (disability); this practice was common during some phases of camp operation. The autopsy minutes confirmed that he had amputation of his left foot, it was probably the recent amputation because it was stated that his left foot was bandaged as well (stump?). He also did not have phalangs on his right foot (due to trauma or frostbite?). Sidorenko worked at the city hospital after liberation and was involved in the Soviet partisan movement. It seems he and other partisans were betrayed by their comrade Mikhail Tiugachiov (unconfirmed information), who could be executed within the same group as Sidorenko.*

*However, Grigorii was arrested on 1st December 1943 and executed at the PoW cemetery on 5th January 1944, probably due to the offensive of the Soviet troops. Victims had been driven to the killing site by truck escorted by another car. They were shot one by one. And the rest had to wait in the truck. Two women made an attempt to escape but were shot. People who knew Sidorenko identified his remains during exhumation and confirmed his identity. The cause of his death was a gunshot wound to the head. He was shot in the nape from a close distance.*

*It is fair to say that Georgii had the most comprehensive reconstruction of his last minutes in contrast with other victims of Slavuta remained unnamed and commemorated.*

<sup>777</sup> Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 218 *Act of medico-legal expertise, 20-27 April 1944.*

<sup>778</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.899 p. 55 *Exhumation minutes of body 582 from grave 642; YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 13-14 Testimony of A. Bukhtiichuk.*

<sup>779</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 13, 14 *Testimony of A. Bukhtiichuk.*





*Plate 6.11. Process of identification at the camp cemetery (Object 1) in April 1944.. It is hard to say who those two women on the plate were. They might be relatives of deceased persons or, most likely, they were *poniatye* (witnesses) during the procedure of the exhumations of cadavers.<sup>780</sup>*

The Germans tried to prevent any communication between camp prisoners and civilians.<sup>781</sup> In addition, local people who tried to help or free PoWs were beaten, arrested or even shot by Nazis.<sup>782</sup> Local Isovich mentioned that Germans killed hostages, perhaps, from locals, as a revenge for partisans.<sup>783</sup> The facts outlined above explained why some excavated cadavers were dressed in civilian clothes.

### 6.5.2. Number of deceased

According to Soviet documents, the death rate in the camp was up to 300 people per day.<sup>784</sup> The author of this thesis is probably correct in presuming that the number of victims in Grosslazarett was arrived at by using simple arithmetic: the number of victims per day

<sup>780</sup> TsDAKFFD 1-25-18-0-160425-1

<sup>781</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 33 **Testimony of G. Voitseschuk.**

<sup>782</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 53 **Testimony of P. Zhurkovskii**; YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, pp. 10-11 **Announcement and warning of preventing hiding of PoWs by locals, issued by Dr Worbs.**

<sup>783</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 70 **Act of medico-legal expertise, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1944.**

<sup>784</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 4: f. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 903, p.5 **The conclusion regarding the case of atrocities of German occupants against Soviet PoWs in Slavuta camp**; TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 238, p. 64 **Interrogation of S. Alekseyenko.**

multiplied by the length of occupation (two and a half years). According to Soviet investigations, up to 150,000 thousand PoWs died in that camp.<sup>785</sup> The highest number of victims amounted to 200,000.<sup>786</sup> This number is based on witness testimonies but clearly looks inflated when one considers that even not all mass graves were surveyed and minimum amount of camp records are available for researchers (perhaps, minimum of camp records still exist today). Berkovskii stated that 150,000 could be the total number of prisoners that went through the camps in Slavuta.<sup>787</sup> He also stated that 24,000-26,000 inmates died in the Slavuta camp.<sup>788</sup>

Shneyer mentioned the average death toll was up to 150-200 people per day.<sup>789</sup> The peak number of deaths, according to former prisoners, was between the autumn of 1942 and the winter of 1943.<sup>790</sup> In the worst period, the death toll was 300 deaths per day.<sup>791</sup>

The main cause of death was starvation.<sup>792</sup> According to Nazis ideology, PoWs deprived German people of food.<sup>793</sup> The first survivors were sent to Field Hospital 5286 in Markhlevsk (now Dovbysh, the Zhytomyr region) in late January.<sup>794</sup> Forensic medical examination of survivors was conducted in Mobile Field Hospital 5205 and Field Hospital for patients with infection diseases 2197 in Baranivka (the Khmelnytskii region) on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1944.<sup>795</sup> It showed that all 525 of them had diseases caused by prolonged starvation.<sup>796</sup> According to the chief doctor, Veitkov, all of them had complete absence of

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<sup>785</sup> TsDAGO/ f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 1064 *Acts of the Nazi atrocities in Slavuta*.

<sup>786</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 238, p.65 *Interrogation of S. Alekseyenko*; USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 4: f. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 903, p.5 *The conclusion regarding the case of atrocities of German occupants against Soviet PoWs in Slavuta camp*.

<sup>787</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b)

<sup>788</sup> Berkovskii, V. (2014 b)

<sup>789</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 290.

<sup>790</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.91 *Testimony of N. Lizhkariov*.

<sup>791</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 237, p. 169 *Decree regarding forwarding material of investigation in Slavuta to Ukrainian Republican Commission for estimating and investigating German-Fascist Crimes*; YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 17 *Testimony of S. Valaiev*.

<sup>792</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, pp. 17 *Act of survey of the camp area, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1944*, 60 *The Act of medico-legal expertise, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1944*.

<sup>793</sup> Berkhoff, K. (2011), p. 107.

<sup>794</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 87 *Testimony of I. Levchenko; Fridliand, I. (1944-1945) Diary*. Available at: <https://prozhito.org/notes?date=%221944-01-01%22&diaries=%5B4292%5D> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>795</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 237, p.145 *The Act of medico-legal expertise, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1944*.

<sup>796</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 4: f. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 903, p.1a *The conclusion regarding the case of atrocities of German occupants against Soviet PoWs in Slavuta camp*.

adipose tissue and muscle atrophy.<sup>797</sup> The same was confirmed by results of a medical examination (autopsy and visual examination) of exhumed cadavers from the PoW cemeteries and other burial sites within the camp area.<sup>798</sup>

Inmates also died due to poor living conditions (Germans demolished stove heating,<sup>799</sup> window glass was missing (see Plate 6.12.),<sup>800</sup> and inmate's clothing was taken away<sup>801</sup>). Despite the purpose of Slavuta was to act as a hospital for PoWs, prisoners did not get adequate treatment, and the lack of medication was permanent.<sup>802</sup> Only surgical patients (patients with wounds or bone fractures) had a minor chance to get some treatment.<sup>803</sup>



*Plate 6.12. Missing window glass in one of the barracks in Slavuta, January 1944.*<sup>804</sup>

<sup>797</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 25 [Testimony of I. Veitkov.](#)

<sup>798</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 81 [The Act of medico-legal expertise, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1944.](#)

<sup>799</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 76, 79, 91, 102, 114, 123, 145, 157, 165 [Testimonies of I. Kononov, A. Krishtop N. Likhkariov, K. Mostienko, M. Mordvinov, Ya. Novikov, L. Sevriugin V. Filippov, I. Khuzhaev;](#) YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.2, p.24 [Minutes of the camp survey, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944;](#) Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 21 [Minutes of the camp survey, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944.](#)

<sup>800</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.2 p.24 [Minutes of the camp survey, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944;](#) Bundesarchive B 162/21885, p. 21 [Minutes of the camp survey, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944.](#)

<sup>801</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 68, 79, 94 [Testimonies of I. Inozemtsev, A. Krishtop, V. Lobanov.](#)

<sup>802</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 68, 156 [Testimonies of I. Inozemtsev V. Filippov.](#) YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 50 [The Act of medico-legal expertise, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1944.](#)

<sup>803</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 91 [Testimony of N. Likhkariov.](#)

<sup>804</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 109.

According to the testimony of Prokhorova, a former worker at the camp pharmacy for PoWs, she knew nothing about medicine.<sup>805</sup> Camp medics received only 20 pills of aspirin and 20-25 doses of opium for 2,500 inmates two times per week and bandaging of wounded patients occurred only once per 10-15 days.<sup>806</sup>

Many inmates mentioned that the camp statisticians recorded the number of deaths.<sup>807</sup> It is unclear so far whether it was official or unofficial statistics (or whether Germans were aware of it or not). However, some reports regarding dead inmates were being prepared for the camp administration because former camp doctor Inozemtsev stated that it was forbidden to mention starvation as a cause of death, and it was usually replaced by diagnosis of dysentery.<sup>808</sup> According to former inmate Biriukov, some "statisticians" told him they recorded up to 100,000 deceased inmates.<sup>809</sup>

An important reference document is the three volumes of the registry of the deceased. They contain over 20,000 names (a copy found online has between 17,000 and 20,000 names, perhaps revised later). The registry began on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1942 and ended on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1943.<sup>810</sup> Entries to the registry were made by the directive of Kamianets-Podilskyi regional partisan brigade management by prisoners Chamokovskii (Chemokov)<sup>811</sup>, and later Ostapenko.<sup>812</sup> The books were eventually transferred to a local resident Protsiuk, who probably had some ties with partisans. Protsiuk mentions that the first two books were given to her by November 1943, and the third one she picked up herself by the wire fence (probably in a secret place) after 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1943. In order to assess the accuracy of data in these documents, a special Commission was formed, composed of representatives of draft committees from various regions (that probably held regional draft records).<sup>813</sup>

<sup>805</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 134 [Testimony of A. Prokhorova](#).

<sup>806</sup> Bundesarchiv B 162/21885, p. 53 [Act regarding treatment in the camp completed by former inmates](#).

<sup>807</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 41, 72, 79, 159, 167 [Testimonies of V. Degtiariov, P. Kirsanov, A. Krishtop, V. Filippov, I. Khuzhaev](#).

<sup>808</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 66 [Testimony of I. Inozemtsev](#).

<sup>809</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 238, p. 95 [Interrogation minutes of T. Biriukov](#).

<sup>810</sup> OBD Memorial: book of death registration Available at: <https://obd-memorial.ru/html/info.htm?id=62374748&p=1> (Accessed 20 August 2019).

<sup>811</sup> According to Protsiuk, he was a doctor. Lived in Krasnodar prior to the war. Was a People's Commissar of Healthcare for Adygea ASSR (actually, Adygea autonomy region). Executed in October-November 1943.

<sup>812</sup> Was a teacher of Marxism-Leninism at Kirovograd Institute. Was a member of Muzaliov's partisan group from 22 November 1943 till 24 April 1944.

<sup>813</sup> OBD Memorial: book of death registration. NB: Unfortunately, the author could not gain access to the original documents that are held in The National Museum of the History of Ukraine in Second World War.

Later on, these documents were used by Soviet officials to change the legal status from "location unknown" and to issue death certificates with the determination "died in a concentration camp in German occupation" in 1945. These registries are also mentioned in the Extraordinary Commissions reports:

"Witness Khuzhaieva reported that in the registry compiled by a senior doctor in PoW hospital Chemokov nearly 120 thousand people died from February 1942 to October 1943."<sup>814</sup>

In addition, the number of deaths was recorded by inmates who buried corpses at the camp cemetery (Fig 6.18.). According to Inozemtsev (one of the PoW doctors), 10,100 cadavers were buried there from November 1942 to January 1943.<sup>815</sup>



*Fig. 6.18. Funeral people transferring dead bodies from the camp to the PoW cemetery (object 1): drawings of former PoWs Pankin (left) and Sergei Valiaiev (right).<sup>816</sup>*

The determination of the number of deceased in the Slavuta PoW camp points to an important methodological issue. Most of the inmates arrived here by train from other stalags and some of them later were sent to other camps because Slavuta was a transit station for many trains to the West (Fig. 6.19.). About 1-2 trains with prisoners arrived in

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The official response to a request to work with this document was that the Museum does not have an archival collection and does not have such materials in its collection.

<sup>814</sup> TsDAGO f. 166/ op. 3/ s. 237, p.170 **Decree regarding forwarding material of investigation in Slavuta to Ukrainian Republican Commission for estimating and investigating German-Fascist Crimes.**

<sup>815</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 64 **Testimony of I. Inozemtsev.** These numbers were received by him from one of the funeral people. Interesting detail that prisoners responsible for burying of death were located separately from the rest of the inmates: YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 83 **Testimony of A. Krishtop.** One of them survived (Nadzhakov buried dead prisoners for two months) and mentioned that the funeral brigade consisted of ten people (eight workers and two coachmen): YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 117 **Testimony of A. Nadzhakov.**

<sup>816</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.799, pp. 53-54.

the camp every day.<sup>817</sup> According to witness testimonies, about 15-20 people died in each carriage because of the difficult 5-6-day road without any food or water.<sup>818</sup> Sometimes 3-4 trains (50 carriages in each) arrived in the camp every day, and about 800-900 cadavers from each had to be buried.<sup>819</sup> They were also buried at the camp cemetery.<sup>820</sup> In addition, many of Slavuta's inmates worked outside the camp. Due to poor treatment, heavy work and cruelty of guards, a lot of them died at work or on the way from/to camp and were buried outside the camp area.<sup>821</sup>



Fig. 6.19. The arrival of the PoWs in Slavuta, drawing by former Slavuta inmate Pankin.<sup>822</sup>

Seven or eight former prisoners, among 525 survivors liberated from the camp in January 1944, died on the way to the hospital, and an autopsy was conducted (see Plate 6.13.).<sup>823</sup>

<sup>817</sup> Shneyer, A. (2005) p. 273; YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 175 [Testimony of A. Daniliuk](#).

<sup>818</sup> USHMM 1995.A.1265 RG- 22.002M Reel 4: f. 7021/ op. 64 / s. 903, p.8 [The conclusion regarding the case of atrocities of German occupants against Soviet PoWs in Slavuta camp](#): in each carriage were up to 80 people.

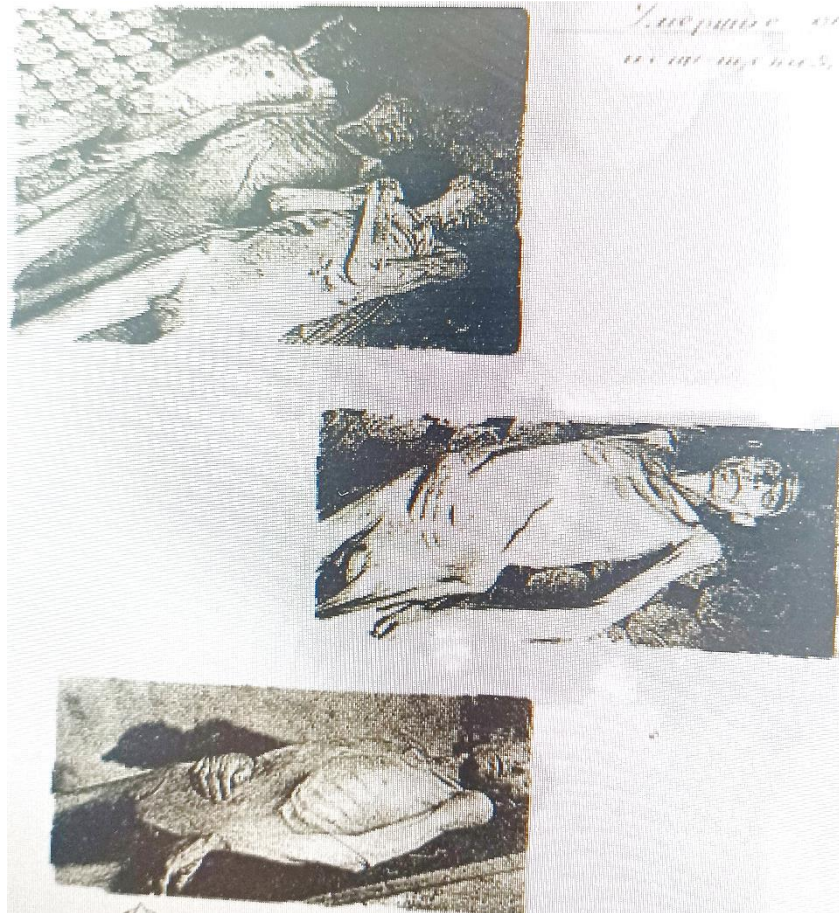
<sup>819</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 175 [Testimony of A. Daniliuk](#).

<sup>820</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, pp. 2, 55, 142, 172 [Testimonies of S. Alekseyenko, P. Zagoruiko, G. Sayenko, A. Shatalov](#).

<sup>821</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.109 [Testimony of D. Milevskii](#).

<sup>822</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.799, p. 45.

<sup>823</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p. 21 and p. 40 [Testimonies of I. Veitkov and Ye. Gurevich](#).



*Plate 6.13. Former inmates of the Slavuta camp died at the hospital, 1944.*<sup>824</sup>

At least 48 former inmates died several months after liberation at the hospital (Plate 6.14.).<sup>825</sup> However, military medic Fridliand, who evacuated the first former PoWs in Markhlevsk, later employed this experience in the treatment of patients with extreme states of dystrophia for rehabilitation of former inmates in Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>826</sup>

<sup>824</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 93 **Plate of deceased due to cachexia in Slavuta .**

<sup>825</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, pp. 24- 43 **Act regarding perished former Slavuta PoW camp inmates who had been evacuated after the liberation to the field hospital.**

<sup>826</sup> *Fridliand, I. (1944-1945)*



*Plate. 6.14. Vladimir Lobanov (YoB 192 (3)4), a former inmate of the Slavuta PoW camp, died on the way to hospital 2197 in Baranivka (about 160 km from Slavuta); He had been in Slavuta since October 1943.<sup>827</sup>*

To summarise, deceased people who were considered victims of the Slavuta PoW camp could be split into four main categories:

(1) PoWs who were sent to Slavuta from other camps and died on the way but were buried here;

(2) PoWs held, died and were buried in Slavuta;

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<sup>827</sup> YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.1, p. 28 **Act regarding perished former Slavuta PoW camp inmates who had been evacuated after the liberation to the field hospital**; YVA M.33/ f. 7021/ op. 64/ s.6, p.94 **Testimony of V. Lobanov.**

**Biographical note: Vladimir Lobanov was interrogated by members of the Extraordinary Commission on 28th January 1944. He passed away on 21st January 1944. But his case is rare because he told his story in his own words (if this word might be applied to Soviet proceedings). Vladimir was born in the Moscow region in 1923 or 1924 and used to live in Moscow before he had been drafted into the Red Army. In Slavuta, he arrived from another unnamed camp on 3rd October 1943. Even though he knew this PoW camp was for sick inmates, he was heavily beaten by the camp guard on the very first day. The reason was a small amount of salt Lobanov took from the previous camp. It seems the worst part of the camp experience for him was permanently fighting with freezing because he mentioned it many times during his testimony. Staying for four months in Slavuta had resulted in cachexia and tuberculosis for Vladimir. Unfortunately, these diseases became fatal for Lobanov. He passed away on 21st January, and his burial location is unknown. For this reason, the PoW graves in Slavuta could be considered a symbolic resting place for Vladimir and other former inmates who died after liberation.**



(3) former PoWs from Slavuta who were liberated in January 1944 but died shortly after the liberation due to starvation, diseases or bad treatment in the camp.

In addition, (4) an unknown number of civilians were executed and buried within the camp.

The limit of available sources and the existence of unknown mass graves thus makes it impossible to calculate even an approximate number of victims of the Slavuta PoW camp.

## 6. 6. Aftermath

After the liberation of Slavuta in 1944, the camp was converted into a transit camp for repatriated allies, primarily former French PoWs. They were most likely living in the former camp's barracks. While this sounds horrific, it made sense since the former barracks of a military base could accommodate a large number of people. In addition, the camp territory was already fenced and located at the city's edge. This was important for limiting interaction between the French soldiers and the local community. However, according to the report to the Secretary of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukrainian SSR Korotchenko dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1945, these contacts were widely practised:

Repatriated French soldiers who were settled in the transit camp of Slavuta indeed had contact with the local population of the city: visited some houses and stayed overnight, were hired to work in private gardens, etc. The chairman of the city council Maziar, instead of working to prevent this from happening, was himself engaged in hiring for his garden a French soldier Persel, who defected from the repatriate transit camp.<sup>828</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that French soldiers had no desire stay at the camp and their attempts to earn a living were most likely tied to horrific conditions at the camp that probably still had traces of recent Nazi atrocities against the Soviet PoWs. Most likely, the transit camp was there for a short period: as of July 1945, only twelve sick French soldiers were still there, and the rest had already been transferred.<sup>829</sup>

Later, the territory of the former PoW camp in Slavuta has been converted to a military base again, but for tank troops. However, the local community still found traces of the PoW camp's existence in that area. For example, in April 1971, local authorities of the Khmelnytsky region received a complaint from local Chernov about the inappropriate conditions of the PoW cemetery and discovery of human remains in Slavuta (unfortunately, the original complaint letter with a description of those conditions could not be obtained).

<sup>830</sup> A special Commission was established to verify these facts and survey the camp's

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<sup>828</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 1480, p.52 *A letter of G. Petrov to D. Korotchenko, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1945.*

<sup>829</sup> TsDAGO f. 1/ op. 23/ s. 1480, p.53 *A letter of G. Petrov to D. Korotchenko, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1945.*

<sup>830</sup> TsDAVO f.5116/ op. 10/ s.397, pp. 81-82 *Note-report regarding executed work during work trip to Khmelnytsky region (from 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> April 1971) senior researcher Scientific-Methodological department for protection cultural heritage sites L. Kulyk.*

territory on 12<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> April 1971.<sup>831</sup> The investigation showed that the condition of the territory of the camp was appropriate despite these former discoveries. The territory was measured at 100 ha (it seems the members of this Commission surveyed not only the PoW cemetery but the rest of the camp area).<sup>832</sup> The territory was a meadow covered with grass, hills, and pits. All these changes were caused by military exercises conducted in the meadow.

A wooden fence surrounded the PoW cemetery (Object 1), where the remains were buried and reburied, and a temporary concrete monument was installed in the middle (Plate 6.15.). The radius of the area from the monument to the fence was about 200 m. The Red Army secured the territory of the cemetery.<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>831</sup> TsDAVO f.5116/ op. 10/ s.397, pp. 81-82 *Note-report regarding executed work during work trip to Khmel'nitsk region (from 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> April 1971) senior researcher Scientific-Methodological department for protection cultural heritage sites L. Kulyk.*

<sup>832</sup> NB: Most likely this number included the entire territory of the camp with cemetery, as well as the site of execution of Jewish population of Slavuta.

<sup>833</sup> TsDAVO f.5116/ op. 10/ s.397, p. 88 *Note-report regarding executed work during work trip to Khmel'nitsk region (from 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> April 1971) senior researcher Scientific-Methodological department for protection cultural heritage sites L. Kulyk.*



*Plate. 6.15. The first monument was erected at the PoW cemetery.*<sup>834</sup>

## **6.7. Conclusion**

Today, most of the former camp area is abandoned, and only the camp cemetery (Object 1) is preserved and well-maintained. An examination of a small sample of the former camp area has revealed strong potential for the existence of additional possible burial sites in the former campsite of Slavuta. The recent archival research and the results of archaeological fieldwork in 2019 also confirmed that burial sites where POWs were interred are larger than previously thought. The main recommendation is that these areas should be protected from further instructive work and misuse. With regard to the research, the aim of this chapter outlined in section 6.1. this survey has:

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<sup>834</sup> OBD Memorial: Grave in Slavuta Available at: <https://obd-memorial.ru/html/info.htm?id=84104133&p=2> (Accessed 20 August 2019)

- Re-evaluated primary and secondary source materials from the forensic archaeological perspective;
- Highlighted the complexity of the burial and killing sites in Slavuta and demonstrated the wide demography of PoWs camp victims;
- Confirmed that possible mass graves exist outside the memorial area known as the PoW cemetery;
- Been the most detailed and comprehensive site investigation in Slavuta since the Extraordinary Commission investigation in 1944.

Even though most of the camp facilities were already demolished or abandoned, the survey of the campscape again demonstrated the benefits of the application of non-invasive methods. However, the size of the campscape area and the scale of possible victims buried within it, in combination with the post-war converting this area as a military polygon, means that the fieldwork campaign 2019 was only the first step in identifying and analysing the archaeological record of Grosslazarett. The archaeological investigation will continue in the area as soon as Ukraine becomes a safe place for fieldwork. It is hoped that the results of the previous survey and the identification of at least one unknown previously of Holocaust-era burial site will inspire new commemorative and educational opportunities in the region, as happened in other projects conducted by the author and the wider Centre of Archaeology team at Staffordshire University.<sup>835</sup>

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<sup>835</sup> *The Lake District Holocaust Project* (web page) Available at: <http://ldhp.org.uk/> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022; The CoA (2020).

## Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

### 7.1. Summary of key findings

As was pointed out in the Introduction, during the Holocaust mass murder on Ukrainian soil occurred not only in ghettos and camps. In contrast with Western and Central Europe (including Poland), where a system of death, concentration, and labour camps facilitated the industrial killing of Jews and other enemies of the Reich, the most common methods of mass murder in the territory of present Ukraine were more primitive: mass shooting, starvation and a lack of medical treatment.<sup>836</sup> This thesis sought to highlight the potential of forensic archaeological methods to increase understanding of the Holocaust sites in Ukraine where these atrocities took place. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the main findings presented in the previous chapters in relation to each of the thesis objectives outlined in the Introduction and to present the main research outcomes. This chapter considers these within the context of knowledge about the Holocaust in Ukraine and considers how new data was derived with the support of various archaeological and forensic archaeological methods that can be applied for research, commemoration, and educational purposes. It also addresses the possibilities and implications of the real-world application of forensic archaeological methods in the current reality of Ukraine. The following chapter (Conclusion) provides a possible strategy for the more comprehensive development of Holocaust archaeology in Ukraine in future.

#### 7.1.1. The value and limitations of previous investigations

In a recent publication, Hirsch stated that by establishing a unique Soviet investigatory body in the form of the Extraordinary Commission, "the Soviets set out on their own road toward bringing the Nazis to justice".<sup>837</sup> Many scholars, in their studies, referred to the data of this Commission when writing about the death toll on the Soviet territories during World War

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<sup>836</sup> NB: the author emphasises here talking about predominating systems of mass murder killing on the ground vs industrial killing in special centres, but some exceptions, of course, took place, in addition, many Soviet PoWs and civilians from the occupied Soviet Union were converted in slave labours in Third Reich and other occupied territories of Europe or some Jews, especially from Western Ukraine were sent to Operation Reinhard camps for extermination, for example. Moreover, the Holocaust by bullets also took place in some Polish villages and small towns.

<sup>837</sup> Hirsch, F. (2020), p. 26.

II.<sup>838</sup> Scholars have also commonly referred to the Extraordinary Commission's efforts at Katyn as the first forensic investigations of mass graves.<sup>839</sup> Unfortunately, however, the attempts by the Soviets to cover up their responsibility for the Katyn massacre turned the Extraordinary Commission's conclusions into "weapons of propaganda" and led to international perceptions of those investigations as ideological rather scientific.<sup>840</sup> Without question, this is a fair conclusion for some cases (e.g. Katyn) (but not for all) investigations conducted by Soviet medico-legal experts.<sup>841</sup> Therefore, despite increasing numbers of research and publications regarding Soviet justice during and after WWII many aspects of the work of the Extraordinary Commission are "virtually unknown in Western historiography".<sup>842</sup>

Furthermore, whilst the activity of the Extraordinary Commission members is not presented often enough in the research of modern scholars, the participation of the Soviet military forensics in investigations of Nazi atrocities has been almost entirely neglected. This is despite the fact that it was a common practice for the Red Army forensic experts and legal officers to be the first investigators on the ground at mass graves and killing sites. For example, in the case of Slavuta, the searches conducted by the Extraordinary Commission members were based on these earlier investigations.

Although some Soviet sources (especially in the case of the estimations of the numbers of deceased) should be re-evaluated, authoritative researchers of the Holocaust events, such as Dumitru and Penter have emphasised the professionalism of the Soviet justice

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<sup>838</sup> NB: for example, the Untold Stories project provides for most of the Holocaust-related sites numbers of murdered people from Einsatzgruppen reports and from the Extraordinary Commission reports.

<sup>839</sup>NB: It was already evident in Chapter 4 that this statement is incorrect but still often appears in forensic literature: Groen, W., Márquez-Grant, N. and Janaway, R. (2015) *Forensic Archaeology: A Global Perspective*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, p. III; White S. (2019) 'Putting "Science" into Forensic Science: A Chemist's Perspective on Forensic Archaeology', in K. Moran and C. Gold (eds) *Forensic Archaeology*. Cham: Springer, p. 214.

<sup>840</sup> Hirsch, F. (2020) pp. 336-337.

<sup>841</sup> NB: It should be pointed out that the manipulation of the results of early forensic investigations undertaken in the 1940s was a common occurrence in totalitarian states, such as Nazi Reich and the Soviet Union. An example of that could be the excavation of mass graves of the victims of Soviet Terror in Vinnytsia in 1943: Paperno, I. (2001) pp. 89–118; the result of this investigation was discussed by the judicial authorities of the Third Reich and later by the USA Government, the Ukrainian diaspora and American scholars. The perception of the results changed based on ethical, religious and political considerations of each: Rosenblat, A. (2015) *Digging for the Disappeared Forensic Science after Atrocity*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, p. 21.

<sup>842</sup> Sorokina, M. (2005) 'People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR'. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 6, 4, p. 797. As seen from Chapter 4 it would be more accurate to say in entire historiography instead of Western.

departments in the post-war investigation of Nazi and their collaborators' crimes on the occupied Soviet territories; and thus the value of their results for contemporary knowledge about Nazi persecution.<sup>843</sup> The results of the author's research as part of this doctoral project have demonstrated that the same statement is applicable to medico-legal investigations conducted by Soviet forensic experts on Holocaust-related sites. The Extraordinary Commission materials give unique details about the locations of marked and unmarked graves, the ways in which these graves were dug, the configuration of the bodies in the graves, the condition bodies were in shortly after the crimes took place, details about the clothing and personal effects present in the graves and information about the trauma inflicted upon the victims. All of these represent invaluable details to forensic archaeologists wishing to find unmarked graves and/or revisit marked sites in order to take advantage of advances in forensic archaeological practice.

It should be pointed out that when undertaking forensic archaeological investigations, each Extraordinary Commission investigation should be analysed separately due to the fact that not all reports were created equal. Various factors affected the criminal proceedings and thus the quality of the scientific data provided: e.g., the training background of the experts, the presence/absence of enough qualified personnel, timings, and the existence of eyewitnesses. Those investigations that were more comprehensive, as demonstrated in Slavuta's case study, can change our understanding of Holocaust-era events and allow us to reconstruct crime scenes to micro level. Others had more limitations. Drawing upon a range of case studies, this research has demonstrated that these include: (1) the level of knowledge of human taphonomy possessed by the investigators, (2) the limited number of research methods and analyses they used, and (3) a lack of professionals and resources (e.g. medical equipment, laboratories, reagents). Regarding the last point, most of the Soviet forensic medical experts were trained as medical personnel, as shown in Chapter 4. The analysis of the Extraordinary Commission methodology also demonstrated that they were most interested in excavating and examining human remains instead of collecting other evidence from the crimes scenes e.g., the killing sites or mass graves as the crime scene, that are now recognised by forensic archaeologists as fundamental to our

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843 Penter, T (2005) 'Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators', *Slavic Review*, 64(4), pp. 782-790; Dumitru, D. (2013) 'An analysis of Soviet postwar investigation and trial documents and their relevance for Holocaust studies,' in M. David-Fox, P. Holquist and M. Alexander *The Holocaust in the East: Local Perpetrators and Soviet Responses*. University of Pittsburgh Press, p. 150.



understandings of mass violence.<sup>844</sup> However, one of the specifics of the Holocaust by bullets events, especially in small Ukrainian towns and villages, is that the base of historical sources is limited. In some cases, only investigation reports described what happened to the victims of the Holocaust in particular locations. The undertaking detailed desk-based research of the Extraordinary Commission materials is vital to ensure the correct research question is set in the planning of the fieldwork. And critical analysis of evidence available from there with the assistance of cutting-edge awareness of forensic taphonomy or evolution of terrain brings new details of the crimes. Moreover, this approach allows the restoration of the memory of millions of silent victims turned to numbers by the Nazis eight decades ago, such as the nameless wife of Shatalov mentioned in Chapter 5. Her name was lost in papers produced by the Extraordinary Commission many years ago. But physical evidence of her existence - her remains and, perhaps, some personal belongings- still exist beneath the surface near the Water Tower in the small Ukrainian city of Slavuta.

The documentary *Spell Your Name*, directed by Bukovski, was released in 2006. Presented therein were the results of a decade of work collecting oral testimonies from Holocaust survivors in Ukraine carried out by the USC Shoah Foundation – pioneers in this field. Now, unfortunately, only a few people are still able to tell their stories regarding their experiences during the Holocaust. This thesis demonstrated that it is possible to learn some more personal stories and group narratives based on physical evidence and traces of the Holocaust. The re-examination of these sources with the benefit of modern forensic knowledge – combined with the analysis of aerial and satellite imagery - became even more important during the pandemic situation and ongoing war in Ukraine when it was impossible to organise traditional fieldwork campaigns.

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<sup>844</sup> NB: Interestingly, a similar approach dominated recently among forensic archaeologists, for example, in the USA (although the situation changed in recent years). As previously discussed at the beginning of this thesis, forensic archaeology in North America is commonly known as forensic anthropology. The nature of this approach came from the training of forensic anthropologists. The forensic anthropology student was traditionally trained according to the four-field approach (archaeology, bioanthropology, linguistic anthropology and cultural anthropology) in anthropology departments. And some alumni could be well cross-trained, but it is not obvious.

### 7.1.2. Well-known sites/unknown mass graves

Holocaust studies in the former Soviet republics have been the trend for past decades, and every year, the number of case studies is increasing. In Ukraine, some well-recognised and symbolic sites are now widely discussed by the community and academia: i.e. Babyn Yar, Kamianets-Podil'ski or Berdychiv. The term *Holocaust by bullets* has also entered into common use as a result of a number of studies on this topic.<sup>845</sup> However, the history of the Holocaust in the East is still less known. The case studies described in this thesis support Bartov's statements that: the essential part of a modern understanding of genocide is to study discrete cases of mass murder in connection with a larger historical context and awareness, and that the Holocaust consisted of a vast number of those smaller events.<sup>846</sup> This is particularly true in Ukraine, where the vast majority of killings occurred during the Holocaust by bullets and in remote towns and villages, e.g., the mass murders at the Jewish cemetery in Busk or the executions and burials near the Water Tower in Slavuta.

The example of Slavuta analysed in this thesis represents the phenomenon of a Holocaust-related site that is well-known but little described in academic literature. For example, Slavuta can be a remarkable example of those sites due to the fact that one of the biggest PoW camps (in terms of the number of prisoners) on the occupied Soviet territories was located there. However, the current landscape of the former camp could be categorised as a non-site of memory, because only a few signs tell visitors about the bitter legacy of this place (e.g., a well-commemorated PoW cemetery, several monuments within the former ghetto and the memorial near the Jewish mass graves). But the area of the camp is abandoned, former barracks are demolished, and local people converted the site into a dump. The major area of burials identified there by the Extraordinary Commission became forgotten/unlocated. The objectives in this particular case to determine (1) how accurate the Extraordinary Commissions records were in describing of locations of burial sites (2) whether it was possible that previously unlocated/unknown graves are present there (3) which material evidences of the Holocaust are still existing in this particular landscape? The results of the field survey, in combination with forensic analysis of the Extraordinary

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<sup>845</sup> Desbois, P. (2008); Desbois, P. (2015); Lower, W (2021).

<sup>846</sup> Bartov, O, (2003) *From the Holocaust in Galicia to Contemporary Genocide: Common Ground - Historical Difference*. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, p. 18. Bartov developed his hypothesis in his investigation of the destiny of Buczacz Jews: Bartov (2018) *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town called Buczacz*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.

Commission materials, allowed to all of these questions to be resolved and revealed that a wide range of evidence connected to the campscape remains above and below the ground, including unmarked graves.

In recent years, archaeologists have shown that a similar situation has occurred at other Holocaust-related sites. For instance, an archaeological survey at Bergen-Belsen (Germany) led by Sturdy Colls in 2015 demonstrated that even one of the most well-known, well-documented and recognisable Nazi camps was far from fully understood. Although the mass graves there were purportedly all marked by the British when they liberated the camp in 1945, the latest historical and archaeological research suggested that at least 15,000 people were buried in unmarked mass graves that had yet to be found prior to this new research.<sup>847</sup> Similarly, archaeologists have demonstrated the wealth of evidence that remains at Treblinka extermination camp, an infamous site where it was believed the Nazis managed to destroy all traces of their crimes in August 1943.<sup>848</sup> In many ways, finding unknown mass graves within the Slavuta campscape should not come as a surprise because the Extraordinary Commission reports made it clear that the investigators had not found/excavated everything. Yet, the fact that these reports had never been analysed meant that the potential for further graves was not in fact common knowledge. However, the first comprehensive archaeological survey of one of the biggest PoW camps on the territory of Ukraine completed in 2019 evidenced the existence of unmarked and unrecognisable mass graves as well as the accuracy of materials produced by Soviet medico-legal experts.

Another interesting conclusion can be drawn that some Holocaust sites have become well-known thanks to archaeological investigation. As outlined in Chapter 2, the investigation in Serniki conducted by the team led by Wright turned this case study into a what is often referred to as a seminal genocide archaeology investigation. Based on the findings of the archaeological investigations at Slavuta, it is hoped that a more detailed history of this site will become better known. It is also hoped that further work in this area will continue to

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<sup>847</sup> Sturdy Colls, C., Mitchell, W. (2021) ‘“An Example of Nazi Kultur”: Paradigmatic and Contested Materiality at Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp’, in: N. Saunders and P. Cornish, P. *Conflict Landscapes: Materiality and Meaning in Contested Places*. London: Routledge, p. 281.

<sup>848</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. and Colls, K. (2020). ‘The Heart of Terror: A Forensic and Archaeological Assessment of the Old Gas Chambers at Treblinka’, in: P. Vareka and J. Symonds, *Archaeologies of Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, and Repression: Dark Modernities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p.83-105.

expand this knowledge. However, it should be noted that the worldwide pandemic and the war in Ukraine did not allow the author to organise the second fieldwork campaign there to date.

### 7.1.3. Destructive vs non-invasive methods

In her recent publication *The Ravine*, historian Lower stated that researching the Holocaust is one of the forms of metaphorical perception of seeking vanishing traces of the past by excavation.<sup>849</sup> As a part of a *forensic turn* in humanities, many historical and visual sources need to be analysed with an archaeological eye in order to set innovative research questions and obtain new facts about this period; a fact this thesis has demonstrated. Of course, for archaeologists, this search for vanished traces is usually literal and, as Deetz summarises, they usually obtain data for analysis by excavation.<sup>850</sup> Even though a stereotype still prevails that archaeological methodologies have to centre on digging, the advancement of new technologies means that the range of methods and techniques used by archaeologists actually gets broader and broader every day.<sup>851</sup>

As part of this study, a wide range of non-destructive methods was employed, e.g., GPR surveying, topographic surveying, walkover reconnaissance and forensic taphonomy analysis of the terrain. Applying these methods in combination with desk-based assessment demonstrated the potential for broader application of those for further investigations. In contrast with more traditional archaeological excavations, fieldwork projects based on the application of non-invasive methods also met modern ethical requirements for researching sensitive and painful topics, e.g. genocides or mass violence. In keeping with the approach proposed by Beorn for the investigation of the destiny of Lviv Jews, employing digital topographic tools not only allows landscapes of persecution to be mapped but also serves as instrument for commemoration and education, thus transforming material remains in

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<sup>849</sup> Lower, W (2021).

<sup>850</sup> Deetz, J. (1977) *In Small Things Forgotten*. New York: Anchor Books, p. 24.

<sup>851</sup> Forte, M. and Siliotti, A. (1997) *Virtual Archaeology: Re-Creating Ancient Worlds*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc; Levy, Th. And Jones, I. (ed.) (2018) *Cyber-Archaeology and Grand Narratives Digital Technology and Deep-Time Perspectives on Culture Change in the Middle East*. Springer; Vincent, M.L., López-Menchero Bendicho, V.M., Ioannides, M., Levy, Th.E. (Eds.) (2017) *Heritage and Archaeology in the Digital Age*. Springer.

virtual memorial.<sup>852</sup> The author ambitious hopes that one of these thesis outcomes will be an moving forward the commemoration and education aspects in archaeological fieldwork projects in Ukraine in foreseeing the future.

It is important to note that non-invasive surveys in Slavuta demonstrated that the ability to deploy remote sensing and geophysical survey will depend upon the topography and geology of an area, as well as how much disturbance has taken place at a site. Distinguishing burial pits from other buried features might also be difficult in the absence of excavation since no non-invasive method provides an x-ray-like view of what exists beneath the ground. Therefore, these methods may indicate a high probability that mass graves are present but only when combined with each other and with archival sources.<sup>853</sup>

This is further supported by the fact that one of the fundamental principles of archaeology is the dominating significance of context e.g., the relationship between various objects and their environment. As Butzer stated, this is the very "basis of archaeology".<sup>854</sup> No single artefact, feature or site can give as much information for the research as a nexus of them.<sup>855</sup> Context can also have both cultural and non-cultural components (including natural objects and environments and well as man-made ones). Hence, the point that Deetz made, that archaeologists have to dig for sources located underground, is no longer valid as many of these relationships are often visible above the ground or they can be derived from sources such as aerial photographs, geographical results, surface finds etc.<sup>856</sup> One would therefore have to agree with the statement that "an archaeologist would be a person who uses material culture as the primary database for the construction of the context".<sup>857</sup> However, the primary purpose of the forensic archaeological investigation is to obtain evidence that might ensure justice for the victims of war crimes or genocides concerning the abuse

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852 McNally, K. 'Digital map helps historians get granular with holocaust research', *University of Virginia*. Available at: <https://www.news.virginia.edu/content/digital-map-helps-historians-get-granular-holocaust-research>(Accessed: 15 December 2022).

853 Sturdy Colls, C. (2015) pp. 349-351.

854 Butzer, K. (1980). p.418.

855 Renfrew, C. and Bahn, P. (2012) *Archaeology: theories, methods and practice*. Thames and Hudson, pp. 49-50; Greene, K., Moore, T. (2010) *Archaeology: An Introduction*. Routledge, pp. 26-30; Caple, Ch. (2006) *Objects: Reluctant Witnesses to the Past*. London: Routledge, pp. 1-6.

856 Deetz, J. (1988) History and archaeological theory: Walter Taylor revisited. *American Antiquity*, 53(1), p. 17.

857 Deetz, J. (1988) pp. 17-18.

sustained by the victims.<sup>858</sup> And in a broader understanding, it means searching, finding and identifying buried or concealed evidence after a certain amount of time (up to centuries) after a crime was committed in spite of circumstances and challenges.<sup>859</sup> This approach does however require ethical and religious considerations relating to affected persons, descendants, or communities to be considered (this will be discussed in more detail in section 7.3.).

## **7.2. Considering the Ukrainian context**

### 7.2.1. Forensic and archaeological infrastructure

Forensic science plays a relatively small role in the contemporary landscape of Holocaust studies, and most forensic experts (and archaeologists among them) circulate among various countries, government and international agencies, universities, or military and police force branches.<sup>860</sup> Examples mentioned in Chapter 2 allow us to conclude there is now a body of archaeological and forensic archaeological projects, pertaining to genocide studies worldwide that are significantly large enough to facilitate the adaptation of current knowledge to the Ukrainian context, and to borrow best practices for developing Holocaust archaeology in Ukraine. However, there exist several limitations that will now be discussed which could inhibit such a process.

The main limitation is a lack of local experts and infrastructure for training forensic archaeologists in Ukraine. According to official information from the Union of Ukrainian Archaeologists, there are approximately 400—500 professional archaeologists in Ukraine compared to 100,000 individuals with metal detectors (who do not need a license for use), who could potentially dig illegally at archaeological sites.<sup>861</sup> This means that there are not enough archaeologists who focus on the study of past landscapes. There are also no Ukrainian forensic archaeologists trained for legal or academic projects. Archaeological training may involve a small component of forensic anthropology. However, an

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<sup>858</sup> Ferllini, R. (2016 b) 'Evaluating the role of forensic anthropologists in Human Rights investigations of missing people', in S. Morewitz and C. Sturdy Colls *Handbook of Missing Persons*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 535-536.

<sup>859</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2016) pp. 552.

<sup>860</sup> Rosenblat, A. (2015) p. 35.

<sup>861</sup> Stasiul, A. (2021) "*Siri*" *kopachi. Khto shkodyt' arheologii Ukrainy*. Available at: <https://suspilne.media/155790-siri-kopaci-hto-skodit-arheologii-ukraini/> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022).

archaeologist who attended one module of osteology or physical anthropology cannot be transformed into a forensic expert. Similarly, they cannot be considered a bioarchaeologist or physical anthropologist.<sup>862</sup> This requires much more extensive training. Likewise, all archaeologists in Ukraine are trained to interpret ancient settlements and so they also require further study if they want to supervise forensic archaeological fieldwork. The question is: is it enough to have good field experience and best practices in investigating ancient archaeological sites (including burial sites and cemeteries) to run an investigation project on genocide-related sites (including the Holocaust mass graves and killing sites)? Forensic archaeology requires a much deeper set of theoretical and practical knowledge than the study of the ancient past, e.g., understanding of spatial creation/transformation, historical context, human nature and behaviour, legal frameworks, etc.<sup>863</sup> However, it is certainly easier to train an archaeologist in forensic practice than it is to train a forensic practitioner in archaeological approaches, since the latter requires many years of field experience.<sup>864</sup> Many of the fieldwork projects mentioned in Chapter 2 were run by field officers who were trained in the archaeology of antiquity (for example, Koła – Polish archaeologist and a pioneer in the archaeological investigation of Nazi camps in Poland or Colls – the second supervisor of this thesis project, who was involved in many fieldwork projects for investigation camps related to various totalitarian regimes across Europe). These experts, who prepared themselves for forensic work, demonstrate the possibility for traditional archaeologists to carry out successful investigations at Holocaust sites. This fact means that Ukraine does, in fact, have a pool of archaeologists that could similarly transition to the study of contemporary society.

Unfortunately, to date, as a result of the paucity of training, there has been a notable lack of accurate recording of fieldwork results, an absence of inter-practitioner exchange and a failure to publish results in Ukraine, meaning that knowledge of individual projects has often been lost, and/or the potential for distribution to local communities has not been realised. Moreover, these practices have led to the loss of archaeological data. For example, the recent research about the topography of Babyn Yar in Kyiv conducted by the

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<sup>862</sup> Moran, K. (2019) p. 6.

<sup>863</sup> Moran, K. (2019) p. 9.

<sup>864</sup> Moran, K. (2019) p. 9.

Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center is well presented in public discourse.<sup>865</sup> But previous investigations at this site which involved the application of archaeological and topographical methods had been ignored.<sup>866</sup>

The complexities of current Ukrainian legislation were briefly outlined in Chapter 2. As was pointed out, the current biggest issue for the broader application of forensic archaeological methods in Ukraine is the lack of involvement and supervision from the Ukrainian authorities. Worldwide practice requires adapting local laws and implementing international regulations and guidance for conducting archaeological work within the areas associated with genocides, war crimes and mass violence. Ideally, forensic archaeology must be framed in standards and/or guidelines not only for exhumation but also for the recovery of human remains, the application of non-invasive techniques etc. In addition, the Ukrainian context (specific factors outlined in Chapter 2) and scale and diversity of sites require flexibility in procedures and methods selection. The current lack of government supervision leads to increasing criminal activities. For example, in current Ukrainian legislation, lacunas mean that it is currently unclear how to deal with artefacts found at Holocaust sites. This fact left the possibility for illegal trading of those on the black market.

It should be noted that the circumstances described above are currently changing due to the fact that many Ukrainian and international experts are now involved in the investigations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion by Russia.<sup>867</sup> It can be assumed that this experience will be the impetus for

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865 Zyavylas' 3D-model Babynogo Yaru 1940-h rokiv. (2020) *The Village* Available at: <https://www.the-village.com.ua/village/city/city-news/304341-z-yavilas-3d-model-babinogo-yaru-1940-h-rokiv>(Accessed: 15 December 2022).

866 E.g.,. Cartographic analysis of old map and plans: Chetverikov, B. (2010) 'Vstanovlennia mezh urochyscia Babyn Yar na osnovi arkivnyh kartografichnykh materialiv', *Suchasni dosiagnennia geodezychnoi nauky ta vyrobnytstva*, volume II(20), pp. 160-166; archaeological testing excavation: Ivakin, H. (exact date is unknown, perhaps 2005 or 2006) *Zakliuchennia pro archeologichni doslidzhennia dilianky memorial'no-prosvitnyts'kogo tsentru "Spadschyna" v rayoni Babynogo Yaru (rig vul. Mel'nykova ta Oranzhereinoi ) v Shevchenkivs'komu rayoni*. Private collection of the author; accidental recovering of human remains in 1964: Rishennia vykonavchogo komitetu Kyivs'koi mis'koi Rady narodnykh deputativ trudiaschyh (1964) *Pro sporudzhennia microrayonnogo parku*, Private collection of the author.

867 Sachalko, B. (2022) Ukrainian, French Forensic Experts Exhume Bucha Victims. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-bucha-mass-graves-exhumation/31803751.html> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022); *Ukrainian forensic investigators start exhuming bodies from Bucha mass grave* (2022) Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrainian-forensic-investigators-start-exhuming-bodies-bucha-mass-grave-2022-04-08/>(Accessed on: 16 December 2022).



developing forensic archaeology in Ukraine. Certainly, learning from previous experiences of projects at Holocaust sites should also feature in this process.

### 7.2.2. Contested narratives: numbers and names

The estimation of victim numbers is one of the key questions of case studies for Holocaust studies in Ukraine. According to Hollander, about 60 % of Jews or roughly 900,000 settled within the Ukrainian RSR before 1941, were deported and/or killed during the Holocaust by Axis forces (including local collaborators).<sup>868</sup> These figures did not show the real death toll of the Jewish community from the territory of present Ukraine. As outlined in the Introduction Chapter, the territory known as Ukraine now, was divided into five occupation administrations (Reichkommissariat Ukraine, the General Gouvernement, the Governorate Transnistria, the Military Administration Zone, and the Ruthenia/Transcarpathia). In this case, the number of Jewish victims from Ukrainian territory has to include people who counted as those who were deported and/or killed from Hungary, Romania, RSFSR, and Poland. Arad proposed to use the term "Jewish Holocaust casualties" and did not include this in his calculation of Jews deported from other countries to the occupied territories of the USSR.<sup>869</sup>

The numbers of victims might differ in various sources, and this difference might be dramatic. Many factors impacted that, e.g., (1) often Einsatzgruppen reports included numbers of one execution or, execution in the same location during a short period, and often did not include information regarding mass murders conducted by Nazi and local police force<sup>870</sup>, (2) the exhumation of mass graves was an exception rather than the standard practice. Furthermore, the case study of the PoW camp in Slavuta illustrated that the victims who died elsewhere but were buried in a specific location also should be included in the overall death toll. This obvious statement follows Snyder's suggestion:

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<sup>868</sup> Hollander, E. (2015) 'International Hierarchy and the Final Solution,' in N. Rupprecht, W. Koenig, *Global perspectives on the Holocaust. History, Identity, Legacy*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 148. NB: for some reason, the author stated that the territory of Ukraine was never completely occupied by Axis territory. The whole territory of present Ukraine was occupied from July 1942 (the Invasion of Sevastopol, the Crimea) until January 1943 (the start on the liberation of Donbas).

<sup>869</sup> Arad, Yi. (2009), p. 517.

<sup>870</sup> Arad, Yi. (2009) p. 517.

“The Nazi and Soviet regimes turned people into numbers, some of which we can only estimate, some of which we can reconstruct with fair precision. It is for us as scholars to seek those numbers and to put them into perspective. It is for us as humanists to turn the numbers back into people. If we cannot do that, then Hitler and Stalin have shaped not only our world but our humanity.”<sup>871</sup>

Another question is who should be included in a virtual list of Holocaust victims and who should not.<sup>872</sup> The case studies of Busk and Slavuta showed that it was a frequent practice to bury the remains of Jewish and non-Jewish victims of Nazi terror within the same location. Though if Jews, Roma and PoWs fall under the concept of genocide (the act committed with intent to destroy a specific group wholly or partly), how does one count "accidental" victims (for example, combatants: partisans or non-combatants: locals who escorted their neighbours to the killing sites or civilian hostages who were killed to prevent resistance)? Agreeing with Snyder's call mentioned in the previous paragraph, scholars should include not only the victims of genocide (or even a specific group of victims) in the area of interest but also the victims of other crimes. In order to enhance this argument, the author showed examples of victims' biographies from various victim groups in Chapters 5 and 6 (a Jewish woman, a young PoW and a member of the Soviet resistance).

Current international law highlights various types of crimes related to mass violence: war crimes, crimes against humanity, terrorism and genocide.<sup>873</sup> Historians also proposed distinct terms for crimes which cannot be covered under *genocide* or *crimes against humanity*.<sup>874</sup> Though, discussions about correct terminology appeared frequently in the legal field rather than academic or commemoration.

As the case study of the PoW cemetery in Slavuta evidenced, various categories of victims were buried within the same area. This fact posed another challenge for researchers in

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<sup>871</sup> Snyder, T. (2010).

<sup>872</sup> The author appreciates Raisa Ostapenko for pointing my attention to this issue: Ostapenko, R. (in prep.) *Explaining the motivations, logistics, and interpersonal complexities of Ukrainian-led rescue of Jewish Holocaust victims in Distrikt Galizien and RKU*. PhD thesis. about people who assisted Jews and had been killed for that.

<sup>873</sup> Congram D. (2019) 'Four-Field Forensic Archaeology', in K. Moran and C. Gold *Forensic archaeology: multidisciplinary perspectives*. Switzerland: Springer, p. 23.

<sup>874</sup> NB: For example, Bemporad used term *genocidal violence* for anti-Jewish pogroms in Eastern Europe: Bemporad, E. (2019) *Legacy of Blood Jews, Pogroms, and Ritual Murder in the Lands of the Soviets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.14.

identifying individuals buried in mass graves. Several identification methods exist and are employed to identify individuals within mass burial sites: identification via personal belongings or IDs, facial reconstruction, or DNA profiling, etc.<sup>875</sup> All those methods require excavation which is restricted at Jewish burial sites. However, there are some examples when Rabbinical-approved exhumations were conducted for the DNA testing of remains of missing people with possible Jewish origins.<sup>876</sup> Nevertheless, those methods have limited applicability for Holocaust studies: (1) excavations in Slavuta (1944) and Busk (2006) demonstrated that personal belongings and IDs, which can be used for personal identification, in mass graves are generally the exceptions, not the rule. In addition, paper degrades very soon in the burial environment, which is why it is a very rare find in mass graves eight decades after the Holocaust<sup>877</sup>, (2) facial reconstruction can be a very effective method of missing person identification or reconstruction of historical person appearance, but it has a lot of requirements: to have appropriate state of skull bones which allowed to conduct a reconstruction, to have an image of the missing person for comparison or strong knowledge who that person was (for historical reconstruction).<sup>878</sup> DNA profiling seems the most precise method of personal identification of decomposed remains, if researchers do not focus on Halakha restrictions, but in case of Holocaust studies in Ukraine several challenges appear. The accurate DNA analysis for individuals' identification required an all-inclusive DNA database of possible offspring for comparison with the DNA of victims (their possible relatives).<sup>879</sup> In addition, the lack of forensic infrastructure or particular organisations, such as the International Commission on Missing persons for Holocaust

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<sup>875</sup> Sturdy Colls, C.(2016) 'The Investigation of Historic Missing Persons Cases: Genocide and 'Conflict Time' Human Rights Abuses', in S. Morewitz, and C. Sturdy Colls (eds). *Handbook of Missing Persons*. New York: Springer, pp. 551-574.

<sup>876</sup> NB: for example, the case of the Yemenite Children Affair – the case of the disappearance of about 1,000-5,000 children of Yemenite Jewish immigrants to Israel in 1948-1954: *Fate of Yemenite baby determined after DNA from exhumed body matches relatives* (2022) Available at: <https://africannews.com/fate-of-yemenite-baby-determined-after-dna-from-exhumed-body-matches-relatives/>(Accessed on: 16 December 2022); Staff T. (2018) Israel approves exhumations of 17 Yemenite children presumed dead. *The Times of Israel*. Available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-approves-exhumations-of-yemenite-children-presumed-dead/>(Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>877</sup> NB: some exceptions appeared, for example: poshukovtzi of the Search Organisation "End the War" exhumed 130 remains of individuals in Boryspil (Kyiv region), but only 9 of them were identified with survived identification tags: *Ne uchtionnoe zahoronenie boitsov RKKK (2011)* Available at: [http://stop-war.org.ua/view\\_post.php?id=75](http://stop-war.org.ua/view_post.php?id=75) . (Accessed on: 16 December 2022). More than likely, this mass grave was related to dulag (transit PoW camp) in Boryspil organised there in the first months of the Nazi-Soviet War.

<sup>878</sup> Evison, M. et al. (2016) 'Forensic Facial Reconstruction and Its Contribution to Identification in Missing Person Cases'. in S. Morewitz and C. Sturdy Colls *Handbook of Missing Persons*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 427-441.

<sup>879</sup> Oorschot van R. et al. (2016) 'Trace DNA in Missing Person Investigation', in S. Morewitz and C. Sturdy Colls (eds). *Handbook of Missing Persons*. New York: Springer, p. 361.

investigations in Ukraine, makes identifying the majority of Holocaust victims impossible.<sup>880</sup> Some advantages in missing person investigations can be gained by using Noncriminal Genetic Databases, e.g. providing information regarding the phenotype of skeletonised human remains or recognising bioancestry of buried people.<sup>881</sup> However, those advantages are limited by factors outlined above: the population of the USSR migrated between the different Soviet Republics for different reasons (i.e. deportations, marriages, work), many ethnicities were drafted in the Red Army, and it was common practice to send people from one Republic to another for military service.<sup>882</sup> Many people were also deported to the occupied territories of the Soviet Union from other countries.

Individual identification of victims is, of course, not possible using non-invasive methods, which are most suitable for the archaeological survey on Holocaust-related sites, meaning that the analysis must focus on the location, size, and construction methods of graves. Confirmatory excavations may still be deemed necessary if results are inconclusive or access using non-invasive methods is difficult. Such works should only be undertaken with rabbinical consent and will involve only the removal of surface layers for the purpose of verifying the presence of remains before the area is swiftly backfilled.<sup>883</sup>

The case study of Slavuta demonstrated that many people imprisoned in the stalag there were non-residents of a particular area. In contrast with that the majority of civilian victims (predominantly Jewish victims) consisted of members of the local community or Jews from vicinities. Perhaps, this situation was similar across occupied Soviet territories, where the majority of the victims of the Holocaust by bullets were locals. In this case, identifying the remains of all individuals is not required because people from local communities knew who was buried there.<sup>884</sup> However, as Sturdy Colls argued, one of the primary purposes of

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<sup>880</sup> Sturdy Colls argued that the locating and identification of Holocaust victims are challenging in all countries due to the scale and challenges outlined above: Sturdy Colls, C. (2016) p. 561.

<sup>881</sup> Saiz, M. et al. (2016) 'The Advantages of Noncriminal Genetic Databases in Identifying Missing Persons and Human Remains', in S. Morewitz and C. Sturdy Colls (eds). *Handbook of Missing Persons*. New York: Springer, p.375.

<sup>882</sup> NB: the case of Slavuta demonstrated that victims of the PoW camp were originally from Caucasian and Middle Asian Republics of the USSR. This fact allowed some Jews to pretend to be Muslims and survive, thanks to this.

<sup>883</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2018) pp. 32-41.

<sup>884</sup> In some cases, the Extraordinary Commission included the lists of victims in the Reports based on eyewitness testimonies: i.e., In addition, Zeltser suggested that most of the Holocaust communicative memory transferred within the families and communities and had grassroot nature: Zeltser, A. (2018) pp. 337-338.

humanitarian investigation of the historic acts of genocide, including the Holocaust, is the searches for burial sites being initiated for future memorial erection, the building of museums or other forms of commemoration.<sup>885</sup> Broadening the net on who was a victim of a given location and utilising forensic archaeology to locate sites offers more possibilities to do this.

Undoubtedly, the Holocaust is more investigated than other genocides, and historiography covered many topics. Nevertheless, as outlined above, there are many gaps in our knowledge about this genocide and the number of victims among those. As presented in Chapter 5, sometimes the number of buried people in a given grave is overestimated for various reasons. And this fact can be converted into a powerful manipulation tool for Holocaust deniers.<sup>886</sup> Lipstadt gave the example of how one of the Holocaust deniers Rassinier stated that the sum of German reparations to Israel was calculated based on overestimating the number of victims.<sup>887</sup> In this particular case, he provided no evidence of his hypothesis. Still, studies which determine an unrealistic number of dead in future, might provide the necessary proof for the Holocaust revisionists.

In this context, it would be worth mentioning the ongoing discussion among the researchers of Holodomor studies.<sup>888</sup> The number of people who died due to the man-made famine in 1932-1933 (1934) was counted by many researchers and differed dramatically: from 1,500,000 up to 15,000,000.<sup>889</sup> The most realistic death toll was around

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<sup>885</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2016) pp. 560-561.

<sup>886</sup>Tiedemann, H. *Babi Yar: Critical Questions and Comments*. Available at: [www.vho.org/GB/Books/dth/fndbabiya.html](http://www.vho.org/GB/Books/dth/fndbabiya.html). (Accessed: 11 November 2021).

<sup>887</sup> Lipstadt, D. (1993) *Denying of the Holocaust. The Growing Assault On Truth And Memory UK*, p. 63.

<sup>888</sup> NB: The author considers that Holodomor was the genocide of Ukrainian peasants as a social group (in the broad meaning of this concept, including other ethnical and religious groups who settled the territory of the USSR in 1932-1934). Still, this thesis does not focus on the discussion of Holodomor perception. This part was included in the thesis because it highlighted important methodological challenges similar to those within the Holocaust study field introduced above.

<sup>889</sup>Yefimenko, H. (2016) *Skil'ky z nas zagynulo? Prychyny ta naslidky rozmaittia otsinok kil'kosti zahyblyh vid Holodomoru*. Available at: <http://likbez.org.ua/ua/ukrayinska-skilki-zh-nas-zaginulo-prichini-ta-naslidki-rozmayittya-otsinok-kilkosti-zagiblih-vid-golodomoru.html> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022).NB: the variability of numbers explained the absence of archival sources such as death certificates, death registration books, and other lists mentioned the death toll, and the majority of victims were buried in mass graves with no registration, often with any marking of those burial sites. Even though the number of fieldwork projects on sites related to various genocide increases every year, no project for searching Holodomor victims' mass graves is known by the author so far.

3,500,000-5,000,000.<sup>890</sup> A recent estimation of demographical losses during the Holodomor, which is claimed to be based on forensic expertise, gave the death toll of about 10,500,000 people.<sup>891</sup> The Ukrainian academic community stated that these numbers are overestimated.<sup>892</sup> Critical analysis demonstrated that the authors of those calculations made many mistakes and falsifications: (1) forensic conclusions were made by researchers without the appropriate level of qualification (non-experts), (2) applied methodology of estimation of demographical losses is not clear, (3) the lack of cross-referencing and cross-checking with other types of sources, (4) the research consisted of many manipulations and speculative facts.<sup>893</sup> This particular example clearly demonstrates how an overestimated and unreasonable death toll of genocide victims can support the marginalisation and devaluation of academic studies within this area.

Scholars who specialise in Holocaust studies must resist people who deny or question the fact of the Holocaust. One of the arguments of Rassinier was that the Holocaust was a hoax, which was the dramatic difference between the numbers of deceased Jews given in various academic publications of well-known scholars.<sup>894</sup> However, the danger always exists that the situation turns the opposite: deniers would then use the absence of a death toll or only confirmed deceased cases (by exhumations or documents) as a way to say that the crimes committed were smaller. Archaeologists usually cannot participate in discussions about this, particularly when using non-invasive approaches due to the limitations of those

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890 Wolowyla, O. (2018) *Understanding Holodomor loss numbers*. Available at: <https://education.holodomor.ca/understanding-holodomor-loss-numbers/> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022); Yefimenko, H. (2016).

891 Petryshyn, O. Gerasymenko, M. and Stasiuk, O. (2021) *Genotsyd ukrainsiv 1932-1933 za materialamy dosudovyh rozsliduvan'*. Kyiv: vydavnytstvo Marka Mel'nyka, p. 372.

892 Shvydchenko, T. (2022) *Genotsyd poza tsyframy: fal'syifikatsiya informatsii pro Holodomor*. Available at: <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2022/01/18/160798/> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022); *Vidkrytyi lyst naukovtsiv ta hromads'kosti schodo fal'syifikatsii u sferi doslidzennia ta poshyrenia informatsii pro Holodomor-genotsyd Ukrain's'kogo narodu*. Available at: <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/columns/2021/12/1/160581/> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022).

893 Yefimenko, H. (2021) *Yak znetsiniuet'sia rozpovid' pro Holodomor. Episod 1: "Formula Asatkina" vid slidchih NKVS yak argument v otsintsi vtrat*. Available at: <https://likbez.org.ua/ua/ukrayinska-yak-znetsinyuyetsya-rozpovid-pro-golodomor-epizod-1-formula-asatkina-vid-slidchih-nkvs-yak-argument-v-otsintsi-vtrat.html>. (Accessed on: 16 December 2022); Yefimenko, H. (2022) *Yak ne varto rozpovidaty pro genocyd*. Available at: <https://likbez.org.ua/ua/ukrayinska-yak-ne-var-to-rozpovidati-pro-genotsid.html> (Accessed on: 16 December 2022); Instytut demografii ta sotsial'nyh doslidzen' ineni M.V. Ptuhy (2021) *Analitychni materialy Instytutu demografii ta sotsial'nyh doslidzen' imeni M. V. Ptuhy NAN Ukrainy*. Available at: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcgclcfefindmkaj/https://idss.org.ua/arhiv/301\\_21122021.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcgclcfefindmkaj/https://idss.org.ua/arhiv/301_21122021.pdf) (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

894 Lipstadt, D. (1993) p. 65.

methods. Nevertheless, the contribution of genocide archaeology could benefit on individual stories and an understanding of the crime scene.

### **7.3. Perspectives and recommendations for future investigations**

Resulting from the review of previous investigations and the new field investigations conducted as part of this study, this concluding section provides a set of General Recommendations for the application of forensic archaeological methods in Ukraine. These recommendations also take into account current Ukrainian legislation and research infrastructure in Ukraine, which as outlined above, represent critical limitations. For this reason, worldwide practice has also influenced these proposals:

One of the key challenges for modern scholars is to find a balance between compliance with international standards and academic principles, and undertaking investigations in a way that does not upset, offend or disrespect others. Through this sense, the author argues that close coordination between scholars, the local community and authorities and consideration of religious rules are required at all stages of the works. A success story of a non-profit organisation focused on Holocaust site identification, research and commemoration while maintaining religious rules is the Polish foundation *Zapomniane and Ukrainian – American organisation Rohatyn Jewish Heritage*. The modern Ukrainian legal system does not stipulate this provision, but since Holocaust studies are not considered legal proceedings, scientists should observe the religious norms of Judaism due to the fact that the biggest category of Holocaust victims were Jews. Due to the scale and diversity of Jewish mass graves (including not only Holocaust but also pogrom victim burials), closer cooperation with Jewish religious authorities in Ukraine is necessary for the broader application of Holocaust archaeology in Ukraine. It would be worth applying internationally successful experience to organise a particular body of rabbinical supervision for all investigations in Ukraine, similar to the *Zapomniane* foundation in Poland or ZAKA in Israel.

All fieldwork projects must be negotiated and approved by regional and state authorities (see example of approval documents in Appendix B).

The comprehensive desk-based assessment before the fieldwork must include a rigorous review of any previous investigations, oral histories and a wide range of archival sources, e.g. eyewitness testimonies, the broadest range of the Extraordinary Commission materials, the reports of previous investigations. This approach is supported by posing accurate research questions and understanding what information can be obtained during fieldwork. In addition, those assessments will assist with correctly interpreting archaeologically derived data aftermath.

Worldwide best practices must be implemented in conjunction with Ukrainian reality. Sites associated with acts of genocide should be regarded as crime scenes even if the work is not undertaken as part of criminal proceedings. The adoption of internationally recognised forensic excavation and recording methods is essential.<sup>895</sup> In this case, it is worth drawing inspiration from the experience of investigation of the victims of the Spanish Civilian War, which has several similarities: (1) similar types of sites (mass graves); (2) close dates (1936-1939 and 1939 (1941)-1944); (3) most of the remains are skeletonised; (4) there is a lack information from other sources; and (5) various category of victims existed within the same burial site/deathscape.<sup>896</sup>

Archaeological excavations are destructive methods, and the level of technologies currently, does not allow sites to be preserved in their original form in contrast with non-invasive methods. Though these technologies sometimes do not provide enough information (compared to excavations), they offer the opportunity to record a greater breadth of evidence types and on a larger scale. Therefore, non-invasive approaches should be considered in advance of or even instead of excavation in order to ensure a wide range of evidence types are located, recorded and characterised. Moreover, Ukrainian

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<sup>895</sup> *Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Deaths* (2016) Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinnesotaProtocol.pdf> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022); *Bournemouth Protocol on Mass Grave Protection and Investigation* (2020) Available at: <https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/news/2021-01-27/bournemouth-protocol-mass-grave-protection-investigation-published> (Accessed on: 18 December 2022).

<sup>896</sup> For more information see: Ferrándiz, F. (2014). *Subterranean Autopsies: Exhumations of Mass Graves in Contemporary Spain*. In: *Space and the Memories of Violence*. Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies. Palgrave Macmillan, London.



archaeologists already had success experience employing non-invasive methods for surveying ancient sites.<sup>897</sup>

The situation in Ukraine changes dramatically almost every day. The original idea of this thesis (conceived in 2018) was changed many times due to various circumstances (e.g. the pandemic, war). This fact demonstrates that a universal solution for how to adapt forensic archaeological methods for Ukraine does not exist. However, the rising interest in Holocaust studies in Eastern Europe, as well as the number of scholars that employ/adapt forensic archaeological approaches or its elements for their research, show that these techniques have many benefits and offer new perspectives for Holocaust studies in Ukraine.

Hopefully, Ukraine will also once again be a popular destination for families to visit to commemorate their loved ones and also for heritage tourism. In this context important to note that:

“The gravesites of the people who had been shot and the monuments marking these sites became the primary link that for many years brought together Jewish natives of particular locations, regardless of their age, gender, social status, or current place of residence.”<sup>898</sup>

Certainly, many people arrived in Ukraine to search for their ancestors (particularly after uncovering the ancestry by DNA tests) and wanting to know where they were buried in the years before the pandemic and the Full-Scale War. As already noted by Sturdy Colls, archaeological investigations being undertaken at a wide range of Holocaust-related sites across Europe have played a significant role in providing answers for descendants of Holocaust victims and have illustrated the capability to reveal more information about those events.<sup>899</sup> This is a finding echoed by this thesis.

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<sup>897</sup> Twardetski, A. Buisikh, A., Novichenkova, M. (2017) Pol'sko-Ukrainska misiya v Olvii: pershi rezul'taty novogo doslidnyts'kogo proektu. In *Pivnichne Prychornomoria za antychnoi doby*. Kyiv; Bondar, K. (2021). *Geofizychni metody v archeologii: teoriya, metodologiya, praktyka (avtoreferat)*. Kyiv.

<sup>898</sup> Zeltser, A. (2018) p. 341.

<sup>899</sup> Sturdy Colls C. (2012) p. 443.

#### 7.4. Future considerations

As demonstrated throughout this study, much work is still needed to ensure that Holocaust archaeology can be broadly applied in Ukraine. In future, it is necessary to develop Ukrainian legislation and include the mechanisms for obtaining permission to undertake fieldwork (including those that employ non-invasive methods) and to assess any local issues that might impact the research. The important part of that is to define the main body of power which would be responsible for (1) determining the appropriate level of qualification for investigators (similar to the procedure for obtaining permits for fieldwork on ancient sites), (2) the creation of a database for all previous investigations (similar to *Poliovyi komitet* (Field committee) at the Institute of Archaeology NAS of Ukraine). The broader application of non-destructive methods should also be promoted and prioritised for most Holocaust-related sites. Despite the fact that current technologies do not allow an X-ray-like look beneath the surface, in contrast with excavation's destructive nature, these approaches preserve sites and facilitate a more in-depth analysis of the full range of evidence that exists within Holocaust landscapes. As technologies develop, there will be even greater potential to reveal information about these sites and the people who suffered within them.

As demonstrated repeatedly throughout this thesis, an abundance of archive material is also available that can transform our knowledge of individual and collective experiences during the Holocaust. This material can also be viewed with the benefit of modern forensic archaeological knowledge in order to derive new findings regarding grave sites that were previously examined. Unfortunately, however, a significant amount of material relating to the crimes committed in Ukraine is still unavailable for most researchers (for example, criminal proceedings of Nazi perpetrators and collaborators from the former KGB archives in the Russian Federation or the part of the military forensic service reports from the Archive of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation). This presents a significant challenge for the future and is a reality that once again supports the need to use a wide range of materials derived from archives around the world, remote sensing technologies and (when this is possible) in-field investigations.

The lack of communication and the isolation of the organisations that undertook previous field projects at the Holocaust sites in Ukraine (with few exceptions) has to date limited the

communication and exchange of information between scholars, authorities and NGOs. This presents a situation, similar to that already described by Sturdy Colls, where the scholars do not know that others exist who are working in the same field.<sup>900</sup> As argued in the previous chapter, successful field experience in researching ancient archaeological sites is not always appropriate for conducting the investigation on sites related to genocide or mass violence; although this can be rectified. Considering the present situation in Ukraine, it is necessary to organise training programs or professional development for forensic archaeologists/forensic anthropologists in various forms (summer or field schools, workshops, University courses, and academic mobility programs). Networking with other scholars in this field and inter-practitioner exchange will assist with the development of forensic archaeology and Holocaust study in Ukraine.

In addition, the cross-site and cross-region comparisons support a deeper and more comprehensive of the events of the Holocaust within present Ukraine. As already noted, the events of the Holocaust by bullets were recorded less often than the mass murders in industrial killing centres in Western and Central Europe. A comparative approach allows for a reconstruction of dramatic events of the Holocaust era at the lesser-recorded sites, finding similarities, trends and differences. The author does not doubt the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but due to the fact that the Holocaust has an unprecedented level of knowledge about it, comparative work can help with the understanding of other genocides and mass atrocities.<sup>901</sup>

With the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine, the importance of the adaptation and broader application of forensic archaeological methods for investigating criminal acts of mass violence (including the investigation of mass graves) increased dramatically. Forensic archaeological methods were applied for the investigations of war crimes in liberated Ukrainian territories. In addition, it is also important to remember that Ukrainian soil is a multilayer landscape of various genocides and mass violence (pogroms, the Holodomor, the Holocaust, Soviet repressions, and crimes committed on the temporarily occupied territories since 2014). Due to this fact, it is vital to redefine the experience of postwar

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<sup>900</sup> Sturdy Colls, C. (2012) p. 443.

<sup>901</sup> Kluessien, K. and Ramos, C. (2021) *A matter of Comparison: The Holocaust, Genocides and Crimes Against Humanity*. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, p. XI.

international justice to prevent the use of the example of Katyn's case by the Russians to avoid accusations in war crimes and/or genocide. It is increasingly important to locate Holocaust-era mass graves since additional graves have been dug during the war - hence it is important that skilled professionals are available who can differentiate between the graves of Holocaust victims and victims from the recent war, for example. This will become more important as more time passes, and it perhaps becomes less clear (in a visual sense due to decomposition) which period graves relate to. Moreover, the ongoing war actually increases the need to search for historic graves. Not only are these sites under threat from the conflict, being able to distinguish between them and more recent graves is imperative to avoid a situation whereby the victims are misidentified as belonging to one episode of mass violence or another.

Another important vector of research in Ukraine is remote sensing technologies. In the short to medium term at least, military operations may limit the resources available for searches for Holocaust-era mass graves in the future, whilst the war itself will also restrict access to these sites. This approach has been a strong impetus to the development in Ukraine since February 2022: a wide range of satellite images available for study which could also shed light on the locations of Holocaust (and other) era mass graves.

To summarise, this research will be continued and extended by the author as a part of a postdoctoral study funded by the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe. A priority aim for future investigation will be monitoring of the graves of the Holocaust, and pogrom victims which will have undoubtedly been impacted by the damage inflicted in the course of hostilities, and the landscape changed even further.

### **7.5. Final remarks**

In recent years, the combined use of historical sources, witness testimonies and archaeological studies made it possible to uncover multiple aspects of how human memories and cognition of events integrated into material objects and the surrounding environment.<sup>902</sup> Although challenges remain, resources such as the records of the Extraordinary Commission, the emergence of state-of-the-art technologies and greater

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902 Johnson, M. (2010) *Archaeological Theory: An Introduction*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 66.

awareness of the Holocaust by bullets amongst Holocaust scholars, offer hope for future forensic archaeological investigations in Ukraine. Forensic archaeological methods cannot give answers to all questions and shed light on each mystery of the Holocaust, but this thesis provides guidelines on how to pose the right questions, which could be answered with the assistance of these new approaches.

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## Appendix A

### Site visit

Berdychiv

08/07/2018

*Old Jewish cemetery*



The monument dedicated to the Jewish victims of Holocaust in Berdychiv and area (location of other monuments and mass graves mapped on the plaque).





*The monument erected near the Jewish mass grave near Liubomirka*



*The Jewish mass grave near Liubomyrka. Signs of looting.*

*Personal belongings and bones fragments:*





*Traces of illegal excavations on the Jewish mass graves near Liubomirka :*



06/07/2019

Khazhyn (near Berdychiv)

*The construction works of the future monument. Fieldwork was undertaken in April 2017 by team of Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University there.*



15/09/2019

*Signs of looting on some mass graves near Berdychiv:*



*All photos were taken near Romanivka village*



*Mass grave near Liubomirka*

Boryspil

29/07/2018

*Possible location of mass grave (local Jews and communists) in Boryspil (territory of former collective farm (kolkhoz "Serp i molot")*



*Location of Jewish cemetery in Boryspil (now – hospital and roads)*



*Monument on the grave of the PoW inmates of dulag in Boryspil. Remains were reburied here in 2011.*





Iziaslav

07/10/2018

*Monument near modern prison (former Monastery). It also was used as prisoners and local police headquarter during the Holocaust era.*



*"New" Jewish cemetery*





*Slavuta*

*07/10/2018*

*Campscape of former Stalag in Slavuta:*









*Location of Grosslazarett*





15-18/05/2019

*Location of Water Tower, Monuments for Jewish victims of the Holocaust and survey grid 2b*



*Territory of the PoW cemetery*





*Ozarintsi*

*30/06/2019*

*Great Synagogue*





*Jewish cemetery and mass grave location*









*Mohyliv-Podil'ski*

*29/06/2019*

*Location of Holocaust-era transfer camp (now coach station)*







ТУТ, В ТИРІ, НА МІСЦІ КОЛИШНЬОГО  
ПЕРЕСИЛЬНОГО ПУНКТУ, ПОКОЯТЬСЯ  
РЕШТКИ ЄВРЕЇВ ІЗ БУКОВИНИ,  
БЕССАРАБІЇ ТА ІНШИХ МІСЬЦЬ,  
ЗАМОРДОВАНИХ ФАШИСТАМИ  
В 1941-1944 Р.Р ПРИ ВІДПРАВЦІ  
ДО ТАБОРУ СМЕРТІ.



*Pechera*

*29/06/2019*

*Territory of former Death camp*





*Jewish Mass graves*





## Appendix B

Fieldwork proposal submitted for fieldwork in Slavuta in May 2019

To the head of division of culture, nationalities,  
religion and tourism of Khmelnytsky Regional State Administration  
Trunova Irina Nikolaevna

On permission to conduct non-invasive archaeological  
studies at the site of Stalag 301/1 "Grosslazaret"  
located in town of Slavuta

Dear Irina Nikolaevna!

Kindly asking you to approve the investigation by non-invasive archaeological studies with use of GPR at the territory of cemetery of former Stalag 301/1 "Grosslazaret" in town of Slavuta between Gnat Kuzovka St, Yaroslav Mudriy St and Memorial'na St (see map in attachment 4). This study is part of dissertation research of PhD student of Centre of Archaeology Staffordshire University Daria Cherkaska (The application of Forensic Archaeology methods for Holocaust studies in Ukraine) and is scheduled for 15-18 May 2019.

Attachments:

1. List of works planned to be conducted during research;
2. List of participants and equipment;
3. Documents from Centre of Archaeology Staffordshire University;
4. Map indicating territory where the study is planned to be conducted.

Kind regards,

Director of Centre of Archaeology  
Sturdy-Colls

Professor                      Caroline

All work on Holocaust sites of mass burial require a careful ethical approach given the sensitivities and religious considerations involved. Jewish Halacha Law stipulates that human remains in mass grave environments cannot be disturbed. For this reason, amongst others, our Holocaust Landscape Project formulated a non-intrusive methodology to locate and record mass graves dating to this period using geophysical detection technologies. These methods have been used at many such mass grave sites across Europe through other funded projects and already applied in Ukraine. A site grid will be established at each of the case study sites using GPS technology followed by Ground Penetrating Survey investigation following guidelines set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIFA; the governing body for our subject field and who the University is a registered organization of).

During the research process it is planned, depending on ground condition, to conduct scanning in three or four places located on the territory of cemetery of former Stalag 301/1 "Grosslazaret" (see map). According to reports of Soviet Extraordinary Commission (Bundesarchiv B 162/ 21885, p. 214): Location of places of mass burial of Soviet POW's and peaceful citizens on the territory of army base in town of Slavuta) the Commission has registered almost 1000 graves (based on materials of CDAGO (ЦДАГО) collection (f.) 4620, op. 2, case 272). Based on estimates of historian Vladislav Berkovsky there were 24-26 000 POW's (not counting civilians, primarily Jews, that were also buried at the former camp), however the Soviet sources claim more than 150 000 killed, which appears to be grossly overstated. During the work of Extraordinary commission only some burials were exhumated (see map). The aim of this study is:

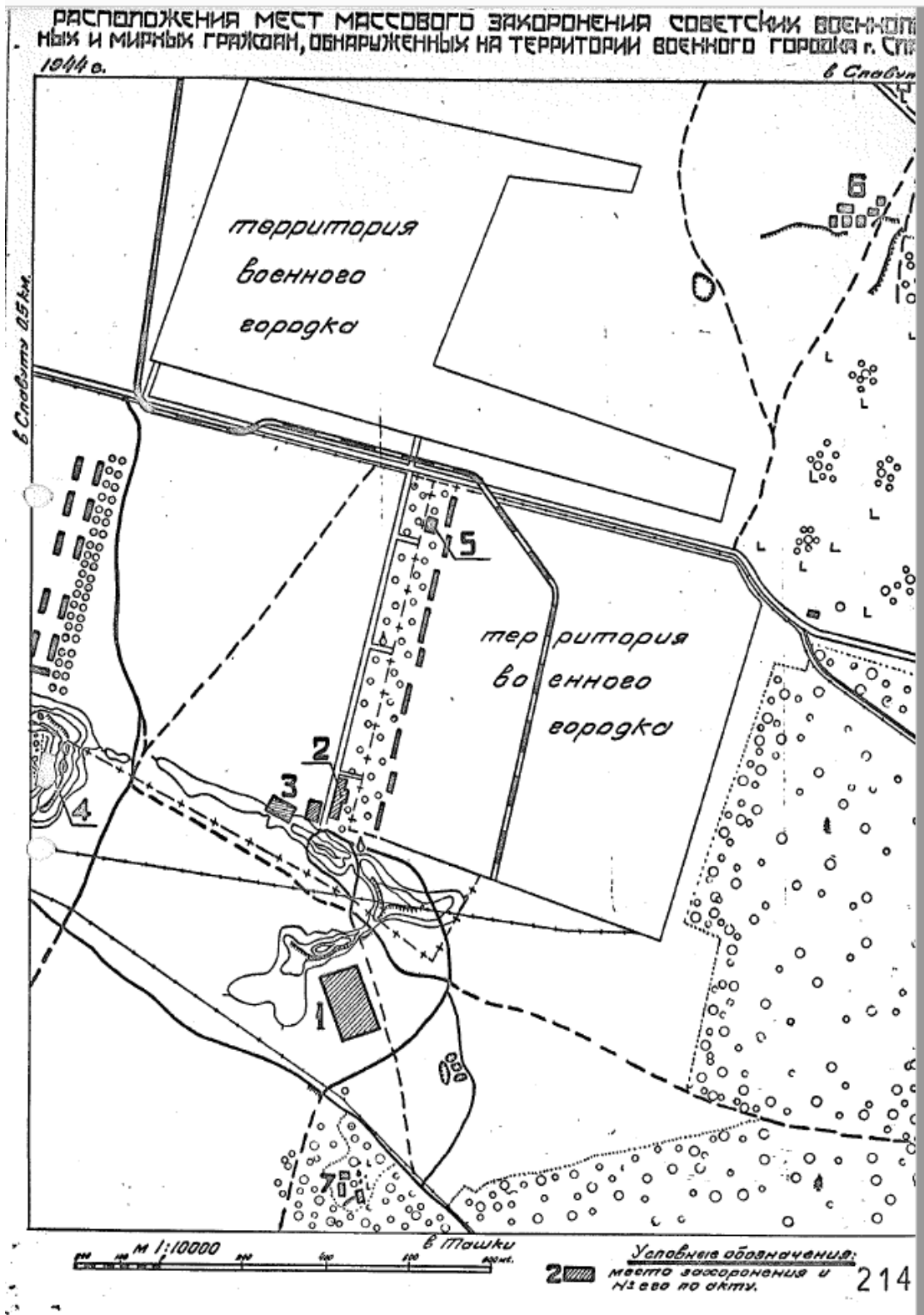
- To establish unmarked graves on the territory of former Stalag 301/1 "Grosslazaret";
- To establish an approximate number of burials on that territory, taking into effect the time passed and the ground condition.

Planned works:

- 1) Light cleaning of designated spots from grass using grass trimmer. Larger vegetation (bushes and trees) will not be touched;
- 2) Scanning the territory (3-4 grids, where radar lines will be set up, approximately 50 m long);

List of participants:

Professor Caroline Sturdy-Colls – Director of Centre of Archaeology Staffordshire University;  
William Mitchell – Project Manager at Centre of Archaeology Staffordshire University;  
Daria Cherkaska – PhD student at Centre of Archaeology Staffordshire University;  
Alex Haycock – Archaeological Assistant, Centre of Archaeology Staffordshire University.

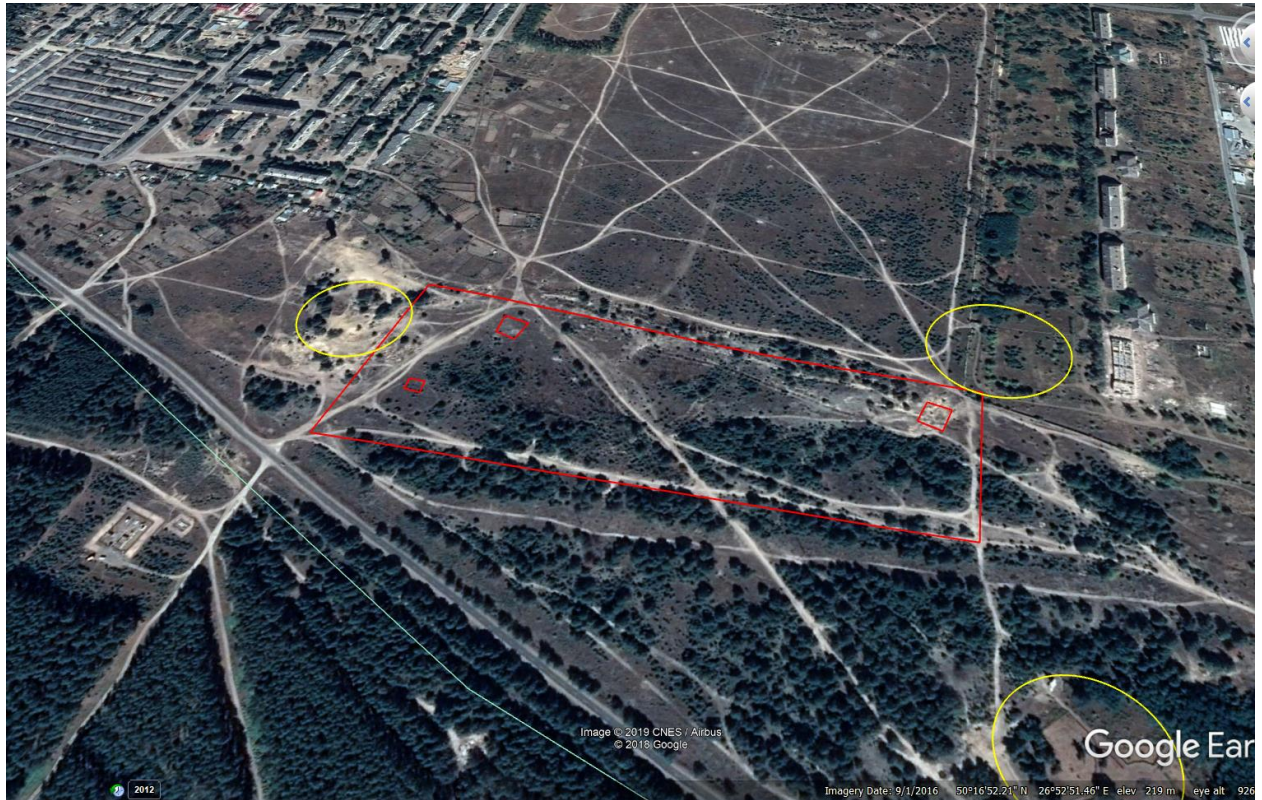


Location of places of mass burial of Soviet POW's and peaceful citizens on the territory of army base in town of Slavuta (Report of Soviet Extraordinary Commission)





Current location of places of mass burial of Soviet POW's and peaceful citizens on the territory of army base in town of Slavuta



Research area: yellow circles – known mass graves; red squares – approximate location of grids for GPR survey.

Permission from local authorities for non-invasive survey in Slavuta



УКРАЇНА

ХМЕЛЬНИЦЬКА ОБЛАСНА ДЕРЖАВНА АДМІНІСТРАЦІЯ  
УПРАВЛІННЯ КУЛЬТУРИ, НАЦІОНАЛЬНОСТЕЙ,  
РЕЛІГІЙ ТА ТУРИЗМУ

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На № 01.04.2019 № 01-488 від \_\_\_\_\_

Директору Центру археології  
Стаффордширського Університету  
проф. Кароліні Ст'юрді-Коллс

Управління культури, національностей, релігій та туризму облдержадміністрації в межах повноважень, визначених Положенням про управління культури, національностей, релігій та туризму облдержадміністрації, затвердженого розпорядженням голови облдержадміністрації від 23.06.2015 року №280/2015-р, враховуючи рішення Консультативної ради з питань охорони культурної спадщини у Хмельницькій області від 26.03.2019 року погоджує проведення 15-18 травня 2019 року неінвазивних археологічних досліджень з використанням GPR (георадару) на території цвинтаря колишнього шталагу 301/1 «Гроссезарет» між вулицями Гната Кузовки, Ярослава мудрого та Меморіальна у м. Славута Хмельницької області.

Начальник управління

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