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“For Dust Thou Art, and Unto Dust Shalt Thou Return”: Jewish Law, Forensic
Investigation, and Archaeology in the Aftermath of the Holocaust

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Jewish communities across Europe were irrevocably decimated during the Holocaust by systematic and ad hoc executions, forced labor, and various forms of ill-treatment (Rees 2017). The scope and scale of the killing, types of killing techniques deployed, and need to dispose of large quantities of corpses—as well as the total disregard for the human and religious rights of the victims—was an unprecedented violation of human life and dignity. The murder of approximately six million Jewish people resulted in an unprecedented number of bodies, graves, and ashes. The atrocities carried out by the Nazis and their collaborators violated Jewish traditions in complex ways, thus presenting a range of challenges to individuals and communities at the time and in the years since.

While these crimes were being carried out, Jews were forced to interact with the dead—a gruesome task that contravened Jewish law and practices of most citizens. Rabbinical leaders and communities faced the unparalleled challenge of how to treat the bodies of individuals that were abandoned, disregarding all rites of Jewish death and mourning. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the vast number of graves created by the Nazis and their collaborators presented new challenges. Rabbis had to decide how these graves should be handled. Should they be exhumed, or would the bodies be allowed to rest where they lay? While Halacha (Jewish law) provided guidance about burials, its creators did not envisage a crime such as the Holocaust. As such, they gave no specific rulings concerning bodies of those killed during episodes of mass violence.

How to handle mass graves is a problem that continues to re-emerge in contemporary society. Memorial redesigns, development works, looting, research projects, and landscape change frequently affect mass and individual burial sites. Likewise, forensic investigations and body recovery exercises in the 1940s–1950s, and an upsurge in archaeological projects since the 1980s has regularly brought these issues to the fore. This chapter will consider each of these historical stages relating to Jewish graves from the Holocaust in order to

evaluate (1) how the specific nature of genocidal actions defiled Jewish customs relating to death and burial, (2) how and why Rabbinical, forensic and archaeological responses to the Holocaust have been at odds and (3) how recent developments in archaeological approaches offer the opportunity to respect Jewish law while deriving important new information about the crimes perpetrated and experiences of the victims.

Halacha (Jewish law)

In order to explore how the Holocaust violated Jewish customs and presented challenges for future generations, it is first important to understand Jewish law (Halacha) as it pertains to death and burial (Schlesinger 2008a; 2008b). The title of this paper refers to a fundamental principle of Judaism set out in Genesis 3:19—"For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"—which confirms that Jews should be buried in the earth. As defined in the Torah, human remains should be allowed to decompose naturally. On this basis, and due to the belief that the soul of an individual can feel the process, cremation is forbidden.

Although cremation has become more common amongst Jews in the late twentieth century, on the eve of the Holocaust, most practicing Jews believed in the sanctity of burial (Lamm 2000, 54–55). The Talmud stipulates that "it is forbidden to move the dead and their bones from the place where they rest" (Jerusalem Talmud Moed Katan 2, 4). This requirement is connected firstly to the principle that the grave is a property of its owner. Thus, "we cannot touch someone else's property." Secondly, it is the result of the spiritual belief that "the soul suffers when a grave is disturbed or even when disrespect is shown to what appear to us to be merely dry bones" (Schlesinger 2008a, 5). Under certain circumstances, such as when a grave comes under threat from disturbance, it may be permissible to move a body only if it is "better for the deceased"—i.e., when their remains are under threat from erosion or desecration, as opposed to when "it is better for us [the

living]” (Schudrich 2015, 80). It should also be noted that there is no definitive consensus amongst all Rabbis concerning whether bodies should be moved from graves that have existed. The majority of Rabbis have stressed the deceased must “rest in their place of burial,” while others have advocated for reburying remains within Jewish cemeteries or in Israel, particularly when bodies were not buried in conventional graves (Deutsch 2017, 93; Rosenbaum, 1976; Breitowitz 1997–2010).

Treatment of the Deceased by the Third Reich

As soon as Nazi Germany began incarcerating and murdering Jews, traditional burial rites were threatened, and the bodies of the deceased were violated. During the waves of killings in Eastern Europe by German units, the bodies of executed victims were commonly left lying in the streets of towns and villages and in forests and ravines, sometimes for weeks). Other bodies were found cremated within burned buildings and in mass graves (Polish Ministry of Information 1942, Yad Vashem 1989). These conditions, as with the majority of killings during the Holocaust, prevented many aspects of the Taharah (preparation of the dead for burial), including the requirement to bury within 24 hours (Lamm 2000, 10–11).

As McConnell (2014, 79) pointed out, the discovery, recovery, and burial of deceased individuals by their relatives and communities became necessary. This was an incredibly traumatising event, not least of all because their bodies had often undergone significant decomposition or mutilation. Such interactions with the dead were usually reserved for members of the Chevra Kadisha—a “Holy Society” of Jewish men and women responsible for preparing the bodies of deceased Jews for burial (Eisenberg 2011, 75). However, the murder of its members and the scale of the crimes often meant that community members had to participate in the collection and burial of bodies (McConnell 2014, 11).

During the Nazi occupation of Europe, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries was also undertaken as part of a suite of acts focused on destroying Jewish culture. This behavior had considerable ramifications for religious practices on a number of levels (Sturdy Colls 2017). Firstly, these acts struck at the very heart of Jewish communities, since cemeteries were considered to be *bet hayyim* (“houses of the living”) and *bet olam* (“houses of eternity”) in which the soul and body of a person reside (Ecclesiastes 12:5, Isaiah 26:19). Damage caused to graves by toppling and breaking up *matzevot* (tombstones), and erasing the names of the deceased on existing graves and excavations in the cemetery grounds were just some of the acts undertaken (Sturdy Colls 2019).

Some *matzevot* were exploited for economic purposes, which resulted in Jewish workers having to participate in the cemetery’s destruction and reuse of tombstones (Brocke 2015). Since many were used to pave roads or became construction material, Jews often had to repeatedly walk past or on the desecrated *matzevot*—another painful reminder of how the sanctity of cemeteries was violated. By limiting access to cemeteries, the perpetrators ensured that Jewish communities could not carry out important burial customs, including honouring of their ancestors and Rabbinical figures, or burial of the dead (Ginsberg 2015). Memorial books commemorating destroyed Jewish communities noted Chevra Kadisha members attempted to ensure bodies were buried according to Jewish law—just one act of resistance carried out as a countermeasure to genocidal acts (Geshuri 1977). However, for most communities, cemeteries remained inaccessible. In many cases, inaccessibility, coupled with remote locations, led to cemeteries being used as killing and mass burial sites (Sturdy Colls 2019; Sturdy Colls et al. 2019). As with so many other graves resulting from the Holocaust, there were few possibilities for the surviving Jewish communities to mark these graves or carry out traditional burial rites.

Figure 1: View of the desecrated cemetery in Frankfurt-am-Main (Copyright: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

The creation of unmarked burials—and those in the killing fields of Eastern Europe or in camps, ghettos, and other places of incarceration—also resulted in traumatic engagements with the dead. By forcing Jews to excavate graves and dispose of corpses (and later to exhume and cremate them), the Nazis further defiled the deceased and prevented the living from carrying out burial rites. The cremation of corpses aimed to ensure that Jews would “disappear not only from Europe but even from European history” (Anstett and Dreyfus 2014, 3). Given that cremation is forbidden in Jewish law, spiritually it was seen by survivors and descendants as torturing the souls of the deceased who have “consciousness and awareness” (Lamm 2000, 55; Levine 1997, 101). When the Nazis realized that they should hide the traces of their crimes, necrocide (the disturbance of human remains) was committed through the exhumation and cremation of the bodies of Holocaust victims from late 1942 to early 1943 and onwards, further violating Jewish graves and denying individuals the right to return to the earth (Domańska 2019, 6).

Within many incarceration and death camps, the dead were also a pervasive daily presence. As Merloo (1963, 96–98) and Cohen (1991, 227) have highlighted, Jews and others were unable to mourn their losses during the Holocaust because tears and crying, wailing and loss of self-control were the most dangerous reactions in the concentration camp. Individuals could be killed for such infractions in these and other types of camps and incarceration sites. Based on psychological studies of large groups of Holocaust survivors, Merloo (1963) has also suggested that “denial of mourning was the most distressing phenomenon to those in the camps in that it caused many survivors to feel as if they had collaborated with their persecutors” (96–98).

Immediate Aftermath

The suffering imposed upon Jewish communities with regards to deaths and burials did not end with the cessation of World War II (WWII). The crimes described above continued to resonate. Two aspects will be considered in the discussion that follows: (1) the effects that killings and body disposal practices had upon survivors and descendants, and (2) the implications of these actions upon post-war Rabbinical and forensic responses to the deceased.

Effects upon survivors and descendants

Numerous publications have considered loss and the Holocaust, several of which are particularly relevant here (Kaplan 2011; Levitt 2008; Epstein and Lefkovitz 2001; Mazor and Mendelson 1998). Psychological studies have illustrated that the violent means by which people were killed and their bodies desecrated by the Nazis and their collaborators led many Holocaust survivors to experience “traumatic bereavement” in the aftermath of WWII—a condition defined by experiencing loss in distressing circumstances (Witztum and Malkinson 2008). This multi-layered trauma regularly led to “unresolved mourning” due to survivors’ inability to comprehend those losses and the circumstances in which they occurred. This condition was also exacerbated by the mechanisms of Nazi genocide, which ensured that families did not know the fate or burial place of missing persons. As a result, they faced “ambiguous loss” (Boss 2010; Witztum and Malkinson 2008; Sagi et al 2002).

In the post-war period, survivors often expressed guilt at not being able to provide a proper burial for loved ones or visit their grave (Giberovitch 2013). In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, many survivors and descendants were unable to find graves because they faced further periods of incarceration, resettlement, and the need to rebuild their

lives and have families (Cohen 1991). Many also faced lengthy searches just to establish whether missing relatives were still alive or find out where they had been incarcerated. These challenges are one reason why large-scale calls for searches for graves did not immediately emerge amongst Jewish communities in the aftermath of WWII. In some cases, the resulting “unresolved mourning” meant that the dead were not spoken about for decades, while survivors experienced ill-health due to what has been termed “survivor syndrome” and the reactivation of bereavement in old age (Cohen 1991).

A study by Sagi et al. (2002) is one of several that noted how a lack of closure concerning the location of burials and the lack of performance of funerary rites led to unusual beliefs concerning survivors’ and descendants’ relationships with the deceased. These beliefs included visitations in dreams by relatives, feelings of possession, and contact by the deceased—as well as precognition and imaginings relating to their deaths (Adamovitch et al. 1980, McConnell 2014). Although no formal study has been completed to clarify this observation, in the author’s experience, some survivors appear to have accepted that their loved ones will never be found. This is partly due to Halacha law and because the technology did not exist until relatively recently to identify individuals. Their acceptance is also likely a coping mechanism designed to quash the agonizing hope associated with the belief that finding individuals might be possible.

Implications for post-war Rabbinical and forensic responses

As survivors and relatives attempted to grapple with loss and the lack of marked graves of loved ones, Rabbis faced difficult questions concerning whether the deceased should be exhumed and moved. Thirty examples of the Responsa generated by rabbinical leaders between 1945 and 1965 have been analysed by Deutsch (2017), demonstrating that opinions concerning exhumation and reburial were often divergent, vague, and sometimes

avoided entirely, likely because the Rabbis were constrained by the fact that “there were no clear available traditional rulings and influenced by historical, social and ideological factors” (91). Although a text written by Zionist Orthodox Rabbi Shimon Efrati (1948) reasoned that “bringing the ashes and bones of our holy ones to the land of Israel” (97) was the most appropriate means of approaching the remains of Holocaust victims, such actions were impractical given the number of victims.

In the years since WWII, the majority of Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Rabbis in Europe and the United States have held the opinion that the dead should not be moved, even to transport them to an “honourable grave” from an “unworthy grave” or “wretched place” (Einhorn et al. 1997, 281). This was most notable when the French *Mission de Recherche des Victimes de la Guerre* (“Mission for the Search for Victims of the War”) proposed to exhume the bodies of French nationals from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and the nearby Hohne cemetery in Germany. These plans resulted in an eleven-year legal battle under the auspice of the Arbitral Commission on Property, Rights and Interests in Germany. They also attracted criticism from the German government and Jewish leaders (Rosensaft 1979). The latter argued that disturbing the graves of Holocaust victims would be “an impermissible act of desecration” (Rosensaft 1979, 155), while the forensic team suggested that their methods—which had been used to exhume 54,000 other French nationals who died under Nazi occupation—could identify individuals by way of advanced scientific analysis (i.e., anthropometric analyses of corpses and comparisons with data provided by relatives) (Sorotzkin 1956). Evidently, science and religion were at odds. Here, as at many other sites in the years since, debates ensued over what should happen to graves when Jews and non-Jews might be buried together (Dreyfus 2018).

Other forensic investigations were initiated in the immediate aftermath of liberation and WWII that paid no heed to Rabbinical concerns. Since there was no legal obligation to

consider religious laws when undertaking forensic investigations, many medico-legal commissions throughout Europe recovered bodies and attempted to characterise the nature and extent of Nazi crimes based on these findings. Some of these exhumations resulted in communities being able to identify and rebury the dead with an accompanying religious ceremony, a fact that was welcomed by some relatives (many of whom were practicing Jews). However, in most cases, these investigations were merely confirmatory excavations; they established that human remains were present and collected basic details concerning the number of victims and how they might have died. However, recovery of the bodies or individual identifications were rare (Sturdy Colls 2015a, 25-27). Following this data collection, bodies were often reburied in the same grave or in another communal grave, often without Rabbinical or familial intervention (The Unseen Holocaust 2014).

Recent Responses

Archaeological interest in Holocaust sites emerged in the 1980s and grew in the following decades. Like post-war investigations, the methodologies of many early archaeological projects centred on excavation (Sturdy Colls 2015a, ch. 2). Excavation projects at Chełmno in the 1980s (Pawlicka-Nowak 2014); Serniki and Ustinovka (Wright 1995; Bevan 1994); Belzec (Kola 2000) in the 1990s; Buchenwald (Hirte 2000); Jedwabne (Polonsky and Michlic 2004); Sobibor (Gilead et al 2009); Amersfoort (Wijnen and Schute 2010); and Sachsenhausen and Mauthausen (Theune 2010) in the 2000s and 2010s uncovered important evidence concerning the nature of Nazi crimes and the experiences of their victims.

Many of these projects recovered personal artifacts belonging to the victims. Some of these artifacts bore the names of their owners and the imprint of architecture of sites to be documented. They illustrate the value of archaeological studies of the recent past for understanding criminal activities, suffering, resistance, deception, and a wide range of other

experiences (Sturdy Colls 2015a, ch. 2; Pollack and Bernbeck 2016; Theune 2010). While most of these investigations were limited to camp structures, some invasively examined mass graves and human remains. In Serniki, Ustinovka, and Jedwabne, excavations were undertaken as part of legal proceedings, meaning mass graves once again became evidence in criminal trials (Wright 1995; Polonsky and Michlic 2004). Excavations and coring at Bełżec were initiated in advance of a new memorial being constructed at the site, leading to 33 mass graves being documented (Kola 2000). As part of a larger project, Yahad In-Unum have also drawn upon the collection of witness testimony, metal detecting, and (in a small number of cases) excavation to document mass graves connected to the “Holocaust by bullets” (Desbois 2010).

Because of their invasive nature, the works at Jedwabne and Bełżec in particular elicited strong opposition from Jewish leaders and communities on the basis that they violated Halacha (Polonsky and Michlic 2004; Weiss 2003). In the former case—as at several other sites post-2000—excavations were stopped following protests, although not before a considerable amount of earth and remains had been removed from the ground. Several lengthy legal battles and interventions initiated by Rabbis, Jewish communities, diplomats, and academics have been triggered in recent years by the disturbance of other sites (Dziennik 2019; European Foundation of Human Rights 2020).

The Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe (CPJCE) (2019), a London-based charity whose mission is “safeguarding and preserving Jewish cemeteries and mass graves,” is particularly active. They are notably driven to act when such locations are under threat of disturbance, such as during building developments or other forms of landscape change (The Times of Israel 2019) or when remains have surfaced serendipitously, such as at the crematorium in Auschwitz-Birkenau (The Yeshiva World 2020). Based on a Halachic Ruling written by Rabbi Schlesinger, the CPJCE’s core principle is that the bodies

of Jews should remain in the place “where they were killed or were buried” unless “it is clear that the graves will not be protected in that location” upon which “the opinion of competent rabbinical authorities in matters of Jewish laws relative to cemeteries must be obtained as to how to proceed in consideration of local conditions and circumstances” (Schlesinger 2008b, 9). In light of developments in DNA technologies and anthropological analyses, this ruling makes reference to the fact that any kind of scientific testing of remains is also forbidden. However, a number of exhumations have extracted DNA samples from recovered remains in recent years.

Evidently, even though the right to a protected burial site was outlined by the Council of Europe in 2012 in their guidance on Jewish cemeteries, Halacha is still often ignored in many European countries. It is particularly ignored when investigative works are being carried out in accordance with secular law (e.g., during forensic investigations) or as part of development. Hence, the protestations of rabbinical authorities are regularly unheeded and Jewish communities may not become aware of excavations until after they have begun. When Jews and non-Jews are known to have been buried in the same location, this has also led to complex discussions concerning the fate of human remains, and the wishes of the Jewish community may have not been considered (Sturdy Colls 2016; Wiadomości 2019). For example, in Jaslo, Poland, human remains were recently found at a construction site near a Jewish cemetery were given a Christian reburial, despite the fact that the faith of the victims was unknown (Jewish World 2020).

Archaeology and Halacha: A more symbiotic relationship

Although invasive works are generally forbidden, locating unmarked Jewish burial sites using an appropriate methodology can reclaim graves for the deceased and provide opportunities for the living to honor them. Hence, in recent years there have been some

initiatives that have sought to locate and mark Jewish burial sites pertaining to the Holocaust and ensure that remains were protected from disturbance. Sturdy Colls' research as part of the Holocaust Landscapes Project has focused on the development of a non-invasive archaeological methodology utilizing the latest technology in order to search for mass graves and associated camps without disturbing the ground (Centre of Archaeology 2016, Sturdy Colls 2015a). This approach enables landscapes and objects to be examined from macro to micro level, and researchers to compare multiple types of evidence.

The first stage of analysis using this methods uses archival research to identify witness testimonies, maps, plans, aerial photographs, documents, and photographs that might provide information about executions and burials (Sturdy Colls 2015a, ch. 5). Second, a walkover survey is undertaken at a selected site in order to look for any surface indicators such as depressions, vegetation change, ground disturbance, human remains, and personal belongings (Sturdy Colls 2015a, ch. 6). The walkover is accompanied by the use of remote sensing technologies such as airborne or terrestrial Light Ranging and Detection (LiDAR), photogrammetry, GPS, and Total Station survey. These technologies can map any traces detected to create plans and three-dimensional models of any above ground remains.

These methods are capable of producing Digital Terrain Models (DTMs) of sites, which can show depressions or shallow subsurface remains not necessarily visible on the ground (Sturdy Colls 2015a, ch. 7). In order to determine whether any remains exist beneath the ground, geophysical techniques—including but not limited to Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), resistance survey and magnetometry—are then employed as appropriate. These methods can highlight contrasts between the natural geology and man-made interventions, illustrating “anomalies” that can be measured and compared to information provided by the other techniques applied to determine the likelihood they represent mass graves (Sturdy Colls 2015a, ch. 8). Finally, all of the information collected is entered into a Geographic

Information System (GIS), which permits layering of data in order to compare aerial photographs with the DTMs and geophysical data, and to examine how the site has changed over time by comparing the layering of maps from different periods (Sturdy Colls 2015a, 160-161).

It is important to note that an integral part of the author's work is to liaison with the stakeholders connected to the events and locations being investigated. Thus, religious leaders, survivors, descendants, politicians, and heritage professionals are consulted in order to devise an appropriate methodology that balances the desire to locate sites with community concerns. In the case of competing opinions and agendas, this dialogue ensures that all parties are aware of each other's views and that they are able to express their own thoughts prior to any work being carried out. Ongoing dialogue throughout each project ensures that any discoveries with implications for religious law are made known to these stakeholders. This guarantees that invaluable Rabbinical advice is sought throughout the process, preventing situations such as those discussed earlier in this chapter whereby human remains were not treated in accordance with Halacha.

Figure 2: Airborne LiDAR results showing depressions caused by the presence of mass graves at the execution site south of Treblinka labour camp (Copyright: Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University).

Figure 3: Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) results from Piaski new Jewish cemetery, indicating the presence of two unmarked mass graves (Copyright: Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University).

These approaches have allowed a wide range of locations— totalling more than 50 at the time of writing—containing Jewish mass graves to be examined in detail. These locations include camp landscapes at Treblinka (Poland) (Sturdy Colls 2016), Semlin (Serbia) (Forensic Architecture 2014), Bergen-Belsen (Germany) (Sturdy Colls and Mitchell forthcoming), Stara Gradiška (Croatia) (Centre of Archaeology 2017), Westerbork (The Netherlands) (Colls 2017), Adampol (Poland) (Sturdy Colls 2015b) and Alderney (Great Britain) (Sturdy Colls and Colls Forthcoming). Other Jewish cemeteries and killing sites lie in Poland and Ukraine (Centre of Archaeology 2019; Rohatyn Jewish Heritage and Centre of Archaeology 2018). Thanks to these efforts, mass graves have been located and marked for the first time, many at sites that were previously inaccessible due to the belief that the only way to find evidence connected to them was through excavation (Figures 2 and 3).

These same techniques have also been used to record traces in six Jewish cemeteries in Poland and Ukraine, allowing *matzevot* damaged by the Nazis and age to be digitally reconstructed and read, pre-war individual and Holocaust-era mass graves to be identified, and other evidence of cultural genocide to be recorded (Centre of Archaeology 2019; Sturdy Colls 2019; Sturdy Colls et al. 2019). Because these projects were accompanied by the restoration of the cemeteries, they honored the dead in diverse ways. Likewise, once the location of graves was determined using non-invasive techniques, in some cases the Rabbinical authorities permitted minimally invasive excavations elsewhere within camp landscapes for the first time. Hence, camp buildings— gas chambers, barracks and infrastructure—and objects that otherwise remained inaccessible have been located and visualised. These techniques have also led to the generation of several digital tools that offer new possibilities for Holocaust education such as digital platforms, 3D models and VR installations that allow users to explore Holocaust sites and objects located during archaeological works (Figure 5).

Figure 4: A matzevot from Rohatyń Jewish cemetery, visualised using photogrammetry (Copyright: Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University). [View interactive model](#)

Figure 5: A 3D visualisation of Bergen-Belsen creating using drone photogrammetry and terrestrial LiDAR (laser scanning) (Copyright: ScanLAB Projects and Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University)

Several other teams have utilized these same technologies in recent years in order to document graves. Freund has carried out detailed non-invasive research at Ponary and Sobibor, illustrating the diverse nature of the Nazis' crimes and acts of resistance while also accounting for Jewish law (Freund 2019). Active searches for mass graves using non-invasive methods (most often GPR) have also been undertaken by two sister organisations in Poland—the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland and Fundacja Zapomniane—leading to the creation of an archive of over 100 Jewish war graves and associated memorialization projects (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance 2019; Fundacja Zapomniane 2019). The use of drone technologies to document Jewish cemeteries, many of which were desecrated during the Holocaust, is taking place on an unprecedented scale as a result of a European Union grant awarded to the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative (2020).

Concluding Remarks

The Holocaust's mass murder of millions of people and their burial in anonymous graves continues to resonate in contemporary society. These events resulted in the need for unprecedented decisions concerning the treatment of burial sites of Jewish victims. These

decisions first arose in the immediate aftermath of WWII and were made by rabbinical leaders, communities, forensic investigators, and archaeologists. Now, they are required in the present as human remains are discovered and come under threat. Individuals and groups making these decisions have variably engaged with Jewish law. Due to its general stipulation that excavation is not permitted, it has often conflicted with forensic and archaeological processes, as well as the desires of family members. Therefore, although considerable developments have been made within forensic investigation and archaeology in recent decades, many of the methods will still be at odds with the ethical challenges posed by working at Holocaust sites. However, non-invasive archaeological methods that allow landscapes to be examined without the need to disturb the ground offer the possibility to investigate Holocaust sites in a way that respects Jewish law and facilitates the documentation of crimes committed.

The application of these methods also responds to calls by family members to locate graves, requests that are seemingly increasing in number as time since the Holocaust passes. In part, this is likely caused by the fact that “a lack of memories and absence of dead family members” (Shoshan 1989, 193) continues to cause intergenerational trauma, and honouring burial sites remains an important part of family and religious traditions. Rather than waiting for looting, development works, memorial redesigns, development to result in the discovery of the remains of Holocaust victims, such methods offer the opportunity for more proactive investigations to be carried out (Sturdy Colls 2015a, 96–97). While many of the themes described in this chapter are specific to the Holocaust, several issues pertaining to survivor and familial responses to missing persons and burial sites have emerged in the aftermath of other genocides (Sturdy Colls 2016b). The need to consider the religious, cultural, and other ethical issues that surround mass grave investigation from a forensic and archaeological perspective thus remain relevant to other twentieth and twenty-first century conflicts.

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