

The application of forensic archaeological methods for Holocaust studies in Ukraine

The history of the Holocaust is considered one of the most interdisciplinary, and multi-vector themes in modern humanities. However, there are many unanswered questions still outstanding. Traditional perspectives of Holocaust studies have focused on the investigation of different type of camps and subcamps (extermination, concentration, Prisoners of War (PoW), forced labour, transit). 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.

Because of criminal negligence of the former USSR policy and lack of involvement from the current Ukrainian Government, most of graves are still not officially commemorated and protected. Despite an increase in recent research projects and open access to archives, many mass graves remain unlocated. My 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.

The main advantages of my research are: (1) another essential component of my project is the comparison of the theoretical principles promoted by previous investigators and their implementation in practice at different sites such as Slavuta and Berdychiv. 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) 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 investigation. Furthermore, better insight into methodology used by the experts led to the more explicit interpretation of their conclusions. (2) 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, such as topographical survey and Ground Penetrating Radar survey. Slavuta is a city in Khmelnytskyi region. Besides a sizeable Jewish community, this city also hosted a military regiment, which served as border patrol before WWII. Then 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 were well documented by Soviets. It makes possible verify Soviet data using modern technologies and keeping religious (Halakha) law. This approach allows to confirm the accurate location of known graves and prove to exist of unknown graves there. 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 in terms of Holocaust studies in the Ukrainian context.

Case studies in Ukraine including mentioned above demonstrated that an archaeological approach could be successful and effective for Holocaust studies in Ukraine.