

Bioarchaeology and Landscape Archaeology of the Nationalist-Socialist Repressions: Central-Eastern European Perspective

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Central and Eastern Europeans live in *Contaminated Landscapes* – as Austrian journalist Martin Pollack put it – traumatized by the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. Within just a few years Nazi Germany and occupied Europe were transformed into a landscape of institutionalized terror forming horrifying “campscape”. In studying them, instead of the traditional historical approach, we will focus on material sources which will be studied primarily with archaeological and bioarchaeological methods. The importance of materiality in understanding the repressive strategies of the Nazi totalitarianism is central to this project because the Nazi “campscape” is represented by areas in which historical memory, narratives, and the biographies of victims merge with material remains of their tragedy.

The first aim of the project is to assess material evidence regarding the entanglement of the Nazi “campscape” in military production and logistics. Hundreds of Nazi camps were closely linked to various industrial facilities and military installations.

In order to investigate this repressive system, based on the combination of industrial / military complexes and camps and their spatial functions, structures, and the living and working conditions of prisoners and forced laborers, two comparative “campscape” were selected: the microregion of the town of Holýšov in western Bohemia with remnants several camps related to the production of ammunition (including the KZ Flossenbürg sub-camp) and Lower Silesian Forests area in western Poland, where material traces of the KZ Gross-Rosen sub-camps related to the operation of the military complexes located there have been preserved.

The second goal is to find graves of unidentified Nazi victims. The research aims to determine how and where the acts of repression occurred. Anthropological and archaeological evidences can reveal the cause of death, the technique of execution, the treatment of victims before death, and the treatment of their bodies after death. In Lower Silesian Forests the search of the graves of prisoners from the camps in Iłowa (Żagań district) and Trzebień (Bolesławiec district) will be undertaken. Due to the absence of accessible intact graves of victims from Holýšov camps, the research will focus on the graves of prisoners who were killed or died during so-called death-marches in West Bohemia (Tachov District) at the beginning of 1945. A similar site will be investigated in western Poland, near the village of Lipna (Żary District).

Subsequently, a comparative analysis of material evidence including archaeological artefacts and biological data will be performed, the results of which will be synthesized and interpreted in comparison with archival sources and testimonies from Central and Eastern Europe. The research will be carried out by the multidisciplinary team of archaeologists, biological anthropologists and historians from the Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences and the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, who have been cooperating for several years.

The social impact of our work will be visible in discovering and presenting the neglected materiality of the 20th century’s “dark heritage”. The importance of this line of research is emphasized by the fact that mass repressions is common practice in many parts of the contemporary world where forced labour is still used and prison camps exist. Certainly, in the future, there need will arise to learn more about them through archaeological and anthropological research. We can prepare for it by perfecting our research workshop and educating research staff.