

Aktion 1005 was the codename for a top-secret operation aimed at erasing the mass crimes committed by Germany during the Second World War. The process involved, among other things, locating mass graves, exhuming the victims' bodies, and incinerating them. The remains were then sometimes subject to mechanical destruction, after which they were disposed of in a variety of ways, including being thrown into rivers or scattered on land. This method destroyed hundreds of mass graves associated with the genocide that took place in Central and Eastern Europe between 1939 and 1945. Approximately 30 execution sites in Gdańsk Pomerania were also destroyed in this manner – the graves of victims murdered in the autumn of 1939 as part of the *Intelligenzaktion*, which targeted the broadly defined Polish political and social elites, as well as the people with mental disorders or disabilities (*Aktion T4*).

Project Objective

The 'Archaeology of *Aktion 1005*' project represents the first interdisciplinary and international attempt to rethink the material traces associated with the Germans' concealment of mass crimes by exhuming victims' bodies from mass graves and then burning them on pyres. The project aims to locate sites in Gdańsk Pomerania where the Germans conducted exhumations from the second half of 1944. The objective is to locate material evidence related to *Aktion 1005* – including the sites from which victims' bodies were exhumed, the locations where they were burned, and where they were subsequently hidden. These sites will be documented using advanced research methods and tools (e.g., photogrammetry, 3D scanning). The evidence found will be analyzed by specialists in a range of relevant fields, including anthropology, forensic medicine, geochemistry and archaeobotany, to determine whether there has been a cover up of mass crimes.

Research Description

The research is primarily archaeological in nature and aims to uncover material traces related to *Aktion 1005* using a variety of sources, methods, and tools. The scope of the project encompasses desk-based research, non-invasive and invasive archaeological activities. Archival research and a range of specialized analyzes in the fields of anthropology and forensic medicine, geochemistry, archaeobotany, and many others will allow for a multidimensional analysis of the evidence for the erasure of mass crimes. This will include recovered burned human remains, wood from cremation pyres, soil from burial pits, and discovered artefacts.

The project is holistic in nature – it aims to understand the past (the organization and course of *Aktion 1005* in Gdańsk Pomerania in the second half of 1944) and to examine the contemporary role and significance of the investigated crime sites. The environment and nature of the sites were crucial to the perpetrators – both in the autumn of 1939 and in 1944, when the exhumation operation was carried out. Forests were the primary sites of the crimes. Therefore, part of the research will include ethnographic work conducted within the new and important field of environmental anthropology. In this way, the past and present of given places will be of interest to the research team.

Reasons for undertaking this research topic

This research builds on experiences I have gained over the past few years while researching mass graves from the Second World War. I am guided by scientific motives – the confidence that archaeology can provide new knowledge and evidence about this top-secret process (*Aktion 1005*), and its implementation in Gdańsk Pomerania. The work also has an important ethical component – the remains of victims of genocide should not be hidden in unmarked pits in forests.

Major Expected Results

The research is intended to uncover material traces related to *Aktion 1005* in Gdańsk Pomerania. The results will have important social, cultural, historical, and humanitarian implications – they will enable the discovery of the remains of the victims, their possible identification, and the assurance of a dignified burial on sacred ground. From a scientific point of view, the most significant outcome of numerous years of interdisciplinary and international scientific research on the 'materiality' of *Aktion 1005* will be a series of articles in distinguished foreign scientific journals. This is the first project of its kind in Polish, European, world humanities and science.