

Historische Archäologie

Claudia Theune

Historical archaeology in national socialist concentration camps in Central Europe¹

This paper is dedicated to Johan Callmer on the occasion of his 65th birthday whose deep understanding of archaeology has enriched my own work in the discipline

Historians have been dealing with the Nazi regime, its crimes and the Nazi terror sites for a long time. Since the late 1980s, more and more archaeological excavations and research have been carried out at these places and a highly productive interdisciplinary exchange is developing. In this regard, the Convention of Valetta/Malta was a milestone for archaeology (<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/143.htm>; retrieved December 2010). This repealed the time limit often defined by laws to do with heritage and the preservation of ancient monuments – archaeological sites younger than the medieval period had not been recognised previously. In Article 1 it is acknowledged that archaeological monuments are a source of common and collective European memory. These archaeological remains and objects are to be from past times; they are supposed to help retrace the history of mankind and its relationships. Buildings, archaeological remains and archaeological finds from the period of National Socialism certainly meet these criteria.

It is becoming more and more evident that the four different sources involved, text documents, pictures, oral history and archaeology, have very different declarative potentials (see also MYERS 2008). Only if we take a complementary view of all sources, will we get as complete an image of the sites of the Nazi crimes as possible. Thus the archaeological sources can tell us a lot about everyday life, while the written sources, especially those from the National Socialist offenders, only show us the official view, but not the real terror for the victims. For the extermination or death camps in Poland there are hardly any other sources than the archaeological remains, hence excavations are the main sources of information in terms of the Malta convention.

A further important aspect concerns the special meaning of material culture. Each period and culture uses material culture not only as functional objects with contextual properties and with a special biography belonging to the object and its owner (HAHN 2006, 59 ff.), but also as symbols or carriers of meaning for something not clearly visible, for a mental image or an idea. In this way, objects in former concentrations camps can become objects of power or relics of powerlessness, of repression and humiliation (DONALD 1998), or they demonstrate how the prisoners attempted to retain their individuality. Sometimes it is possible to decipher objects as specific symbols, especially when different sources for the context are available. As for the archaeology of the former concentration camps, it is in any case possible to ascribe the relics – buildings and their furnishings or small finds – to offenders or victims.

¹ This new version of the paper (March 2011) has been slightly modified and adjusted.

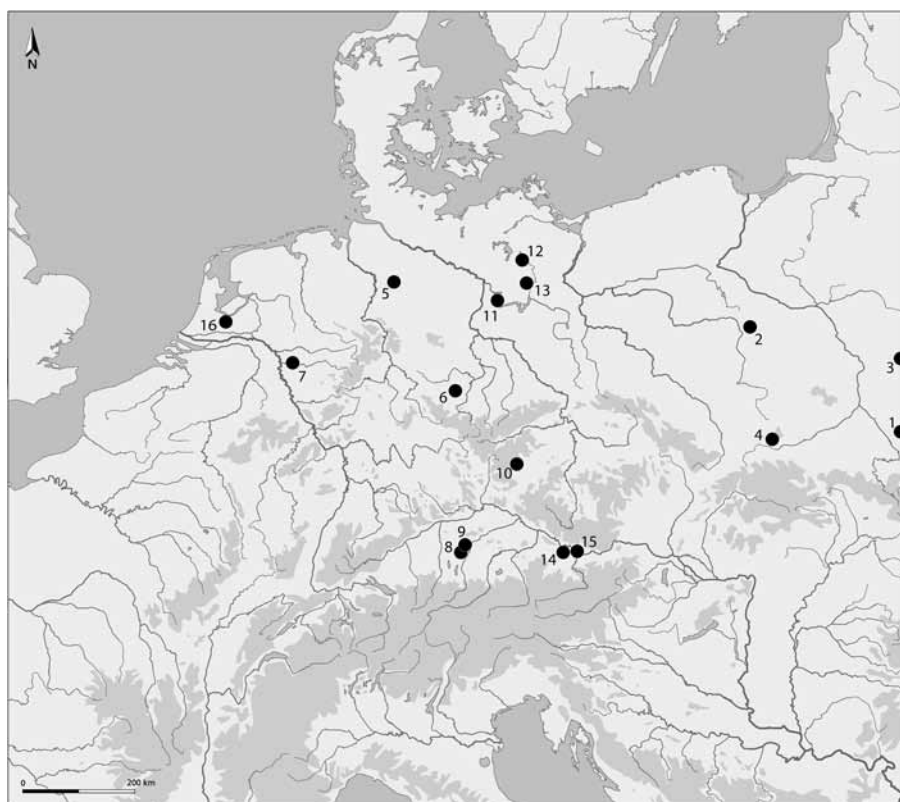


Fig. 1. Map of camps mentioned in the text. 1 Belżec (Poland, extermination camp); 2 Chełmno-on-Ner (Poland, extermination camp); 3 Sobibór (Poland, extermination camp); 4 Auschwitz (Poland, concentration and extermination camp); 5 Bergen-Belsen (Germany, concentration camp); 6 Buchenwald (Germany, concentration camp); 7 Witten-Annen (Germany, sub-camp of Buchenwald concentration camp); 8 Dachau (Germany, concentration camp); 9 Hebertshausen (Germany, shooting place); 10 Flossenbürg (Germany, concentration camp); 11 Rathenow (Germany, sub-camp of Sachsenhausen concentration camp); 12 Ravensbrück (Germany, women concentration camp); 13 Sachsenhausen (Germany, concentration camp and Sowjet special camp); 14 Hartheim (Austria, euthanasia centre); 15 Mauthausen (Austria, concentration camp); 16 Amersfoort (The Netherlands, transit camp) (map by Department of Prehistory and Historical Archaeology, University of Vienna).

2 Examples for research projects in Poland: extermination camp Belżec (KOLA 2000; GILEADI/HAIMI/MAZUREK 2009) – extermination camp Chełmno-on-Ner (PAWLICKA-NOWAK 2004a; PAWLICKA-NOWAK 2004b) – extermination camp Sobibór (KOLA 2001; O’NEIL 2006; Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies 2010). Examples for research projects in Germany: concentration camp Bergen-Belsen (ASSENDORP 2003) – concentration camp Buchenwald (HIRTE 2000) – concentration camp Dachau (DAVID 2001) – concentration camp Flossenbürg (IBEL 2002) – concentration camp Rathenow (ANTKOWIAK/Völker 2000) – women concentration camp Ravensbrück (ANTKOWIAK 2000) – concentration camp Sachsenhausen (ANTKOWIAK 2000; WEISHAUP 2004; THEUNE 2006; MÜLLER 2010) – Soviet special camp Sachsenhausen (THEUNE 2006; MÜLLER 2010; REICH 2006). Examples for research projects in Austria: euthanasia centre Hartheim (KLIMESCH 2002) – concentration camp Mauthausen (ARTNER et al. 2004; THEUNE 2010 a; THEUNE 2010 b). See also e.g. ANTKOWIAK/VÖLKER 2005; KOK 2009.

Abb. 1. Karte mit den im Text erwähnten Lagern. 1 Belżec (Polen, Vernichtungslager); 2 Chełmno-on-Ner (Polen, Vernichtungslager); 3 Sobibór (Polen, Vernichtungslager); 4 Auschwitz (Polen, Konzentrationslager und Vernichtungslager); 5 Bergen-Belsen (Deutschland, Konzentrationslager); 6 Buchenwald (Deutschland, Konzentrationslager); 7 Witten-Annen (Deutschland, Nebenlager des Konzentrationslagers Buchenwald); 8 Dachau (Deutschland, Konzentrationslager); 9 Hebertshausen (Deutschland, Erschießungsplatz); 10 Flossenbürg (Deutschland, Konzentrationslager); 11 Rathenow (Deutschland, Konzentrationslager); 12 Ravensbrück (Deutschland, Frauenkonzentrationslager); 13 Sachsenhausen (Deutschland, Konzentrationslager und Sowjetisches Speziallager); 14 Hartheim (Österreich, Euthanasie-Anstalt); 15 Mauthausen (Österreich, Konzentrationslager); 16 Amersfoort (Niederlande, Durchgangslager) (Karte Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte, Universität Wien).

In addition to a functional or chronological classification, the objects can be interpreted according to their wider context.

Archaeological excavations have been conducted in the large former concentration camps since the late 1980s, but also at prisoner-of-war camps, battlefields, bunkers and some of the smaller sub-camps, especially in Poland and Germany. Excavations have been taking place in camps in Austria since 2000 (Fig. 1)². Only little research has been carried out in the neighbouring western European countries, although there are numerous concentration camps or sub-camps in the Netherlands, Belgium and France, on the occupied Channel Islands (Alderney), in Denmark or in Norway. Research is now starting slowly

here, with a trial excavation in Amersfoort for example (SCHUTE/WIJNEN 2010). In this case, the priority is to record still existing remains in order to get a plan of the camp. This can be the start of further research or contribute to memorial projects as has often been the case in Germany and Poland for example.

The reason for the late beginning of investigations in countries other than Poland and Germany might be seen in a different nexus of cultural memory regarding the Holocaust and the National Socialist regime. Poland was the biggest victim of the Nazi terror regime, hence places of terror are particularly important there as scenes of remembrance, to be anchored in collective memory. Archaeology is clearly able to contribute to this. Germany, however, as successor state of the so-called Third Reich, took the blame for the terror in Europe and the world. Here too, a great interest exists in grappling with history. These locations were not, in Germany, place of remembrance which reflected a positive national memory. Rather they are places of warning about the National Socialism dictatorship. They are Holocaust memorials, places of admonition and places of learning and political education.

Because of the better state of the source material, research results in Germany, Austria and Poland will be examined here more closely.

The entire range of archaeological methods has to be applied for investigations in these places. In addition to geophysical prospection, aerial photography and of course excavations, concerning features and finds below the present surface, buildings archaeological investigations must also take place. Collaboration with colleagues in archives and with historians assist the interpretation and evaluation of the features and finds discovered.

Apart from excavations in former concentration camps and extermination or death camps, investigations have also taken place in prisoner-of-war camps (e.g. ANTKOWIAK 2001; DRIESCHNER/SCHULZ 2007; DRIESCHNER-SCHULZ 2008; DRIESCHNER/KRAUSKOPF/SCHULZ 2001; KAMPS/SCHULENBERG 2007), forced labour camps (e.g. GROTHE 2006), on battle fields (e.g. BERAN 2005), along the Siegfried Line (Westwall) (e.g. SMANI/TUTLIES 2007; TRIER 1997), in armament factories (e.g. ANTKOWIAK 2002) and in bunkers (e.g. KERND'L 1990 – 1992; KERND'L 1995; HOPP/Przybilla 2007), often because of amendments to cultural heritage preservation laws in Germany and Austria. The excavations in Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Dachau and Mauthausen are all examples (see footnote 1). The investigations were frequently initiated in order to draw accurate plans of these places.

Archaeological excavations in these concentration and extermination or death camps take place for various reasons. On the one hand, any building measures in former camps in Germany and Austria are in principle accompanied by archaeology. This means that the building projects in the ground or in the remaining buildings are accompanied by an archaeological excavation and documentation. On the other hand, the public is no longer aware of some of the former camps, since they were demolished, built over and forgotten after World War II. Initiatives have now been taken to return these places to the collective memory. In this case, the outlines of barracks are at least made visible, and these places turned into memorials. Another aspect is related to specific questions from historians addressed to archaeologists; here excavations help to clarify certain issues.

As already mentioned, the state of the source material for the six death camps in Poland is particularly bad. Written or pictorial documents hardly exist, and there were very few survivors from these camps (BENZ/DISTEL 2008). While several plans from the time of the camp exist from the concentration camp in Sachsenhausen (MÜLLER 2010, 86), not a single plan exists from the entire duration of the death camp in Bełżec. Two plans of nearby residents from the post-war period differ clearly from the plan drawn by a survivor after the war (KOLA 2000, fig. 2–4; STENSAGER 2007, fig. 6–7). The Nazis tore down most of the camp and removed the traces above ground in December 1943 when the Red Army was approaching. Archaeological prospection techniques and excavations offer virtually the only chance to learn about these places.

From the 1990s onwards, it has also become important that the results

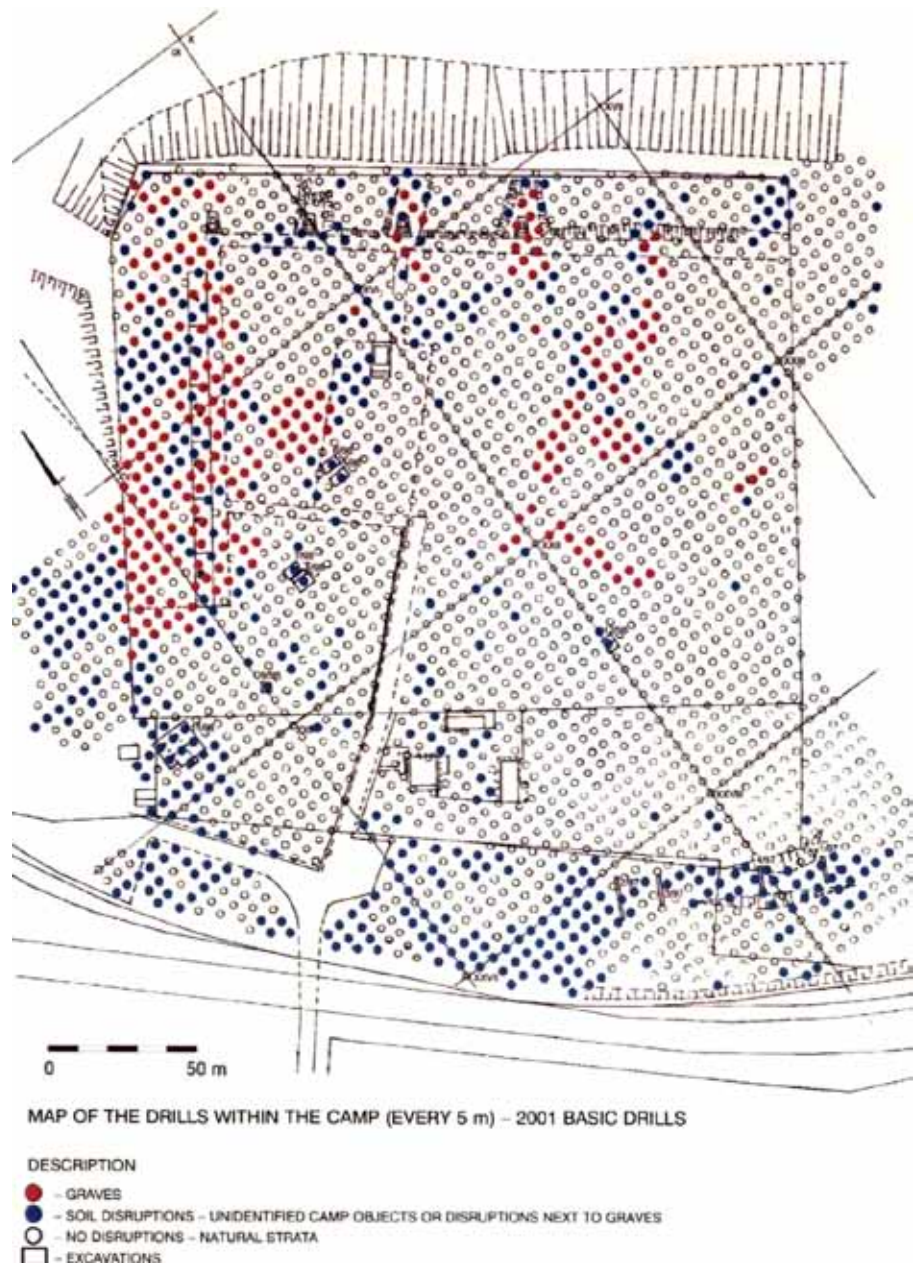


Fig. 2. Map of the investigated area at Belzec, Poland, with bore holes and building remains (from KOLA 2000, 72).

Abb. 2. Plan des Vernichtungslagers Belzec, Polen, mit Eintragungen der Bohrungen und den Gebäudeüberresten (nach KOLA 2000, 72).

of such archaeological activities are used for political education (DARMANIN / MOOTZ 2006). In youth camps, often lasting several weeks, young people learn about the terror of the Nazis. Since there are only a few survivors who can report about the terror in the camps, it is necessary to rely on other sources such as material culture.

Examples from Central Europe

The camp in Witten-Annen, a sub-camp of Buchenwald, Germany, was a forgotten place (ISENBERG 1995). Back in 1988, the city of Witten asked the Office for Preservation of Ancient Monuments to carry out excavations in the area of the camp. Before this, pupils from Witten visiting the Buchenwald memorial saw on a memorial plate that Witten-Annen, their home town, was listed as a sub-camp, a fact they had not known. So interest in this forgotten place and in once again making it visible increased. The aim was to determine the extent of the remains of the camp, study living conditions there and to place the remains under protection. At the same time, written sources were



Fig. 3. Iron fetter from the firing squad facility at Hebertshausen, Germany (from DAVID 2003, Fig. 71).

Abb. 3. Eisenfessel vom Erschießungsplatz Hebertshausen, Deutschland (nach DAVID 2003 Abb. 71).

investigated in order to explore the history of the camp as comprehensively as possible.

Research has shown that in 1945 the camp was cleared and that soon all the buildings were demolished to the level of the foundations, a residential and commercial area been built on the site. Only a small area remained undeveloped, in which however the foundations of some barracks as well as the concrete pillars of the camp fence were still visible. During the archaeological investigations the plans available in the archives were compared with the still visible foundations and remains in the soil in order to match them up or to highlight inconsistencies. Then, the function of rooms was investigated. Many finds were also uncovered which were initially meant to be shown in an exhibition. Today, a memorial stone and a fence remain at the former concentration camp.

Similar studies were carried out in other former concentration camps. Here, the main interest often lay in the renewal or extension of a memorial site to show clearly the structures of the camp. This is especially true for the death camps in Poland mentioned above. A first comprehensive archaeological investigation was carried out by A. KOLA (2000) in Belżec. Core drillings in the entire area of the camp helped make visible the structures still preserved in the ground. In this way, it was possible to locate the remains of the buildings and the mass graves (Fig. 2). The camp was modified once during its lifetime when the gas chambers were installed, a building of several phases. The first phase the building was situated in the centre of the camp, while in a second phase it lay in the northern area. The camp did not have a crematorium. The murdered were at first laid in mass graves uncremated, cremation started later.

Further excavations were carried out in Sobibór (KOLA 2001) and in Chełmno (PAWLICKA-NOWAK 2004 a; PAWLICKA-NOWAK 2004 b) for example. Archaeological excavations have also begun in Auschwitz only recently (MYERS 2007).

A very successful excavation was carried out in Hartheim in Upper Austria (KLIMISCH 2002). This was a euthanasia centre of the Nazis in 1940–1944. Here, the question was again, what remains were still in situ after the war, because it was known that there had been many changes. First, a buildings archaeological expertise noticed massive interventions in the structures. Significant finds of the victims and many cremated remains were found in a trench during an archaeological investigation. The personal belongings of the murdered were found in a pit. The contents of the pit were dug en bloc and placed in the present memorial.

Hebertshausen was a shooting place nearby Dachau (Germany; DAVID 2003). The excavations carried out in 2001 indicate in a very specific way violence and death in concentration camps. As in other concentration camps Soviet prisoners of war were killed in Dachau in the winter of 1941–42 in mass shootings. The complex is characterised by two walls. The border is a wooden wall and a bullet trap. In front of the wooden wall, which could be detected in ruins, there were still traces of the post to which the prisoners were tied. An iron fetter further verifies this procedure (Fig. 3). There were also numerous bones, mainly from skulls, proving the shootings. The findings of these investigations clearly surpass available knowledge from other sources.

Sachsenhausen

The model camp Sachsenhausen just outside Berlin was built in 1936, while the Olympic Games were taking place in Berlin (BENZ/DISTEL 2006 a). The triangular shape of the camp was considered to be perfect for control purposes, representing the geometry of terror. The entire inner semicircle could be seen from Tower A on the south-east edge of the camp. The headquarters and the SS area were situated south of the camp. There were also numerous extensions of the complex, beginning in 1938. The camp was liberated on the

Fig. 4. The sorting machine and the various heaps with the finds from the large garbage pit in Sachsenhausen (photograph by Claudia Theune).

Abb. 4. Die Rüttelmaschine und die unterschiedlichen Haufen mit den Funden aus der großen Müllgrube in Sachsenhausen (Foto von Claudia Theune)..



Fig. 5. An aluminium star with a little hole, like a Christmas star, found in the garbage pit at Sachsenhausen (photograph by Anne-Kathrin Müller).

Abb. 5. Ein Aluminiumstern (wie eine Weihnachtsstern) mit einer kleinen Aufhängeöse, gefunden in der Müllgrube in Sachsenhausen (Foto von Anne-Kathrin Müller).



Fig. 6. A small wooden heart from the garbage pit at Sachsenhausen (photograph by Anne-Kathrin Müller).

Abb. 6. Ein kleines Holzherz aus der Müllgrube in Sachsenhausen (Foto von Anne-Kathrin Müller).

22nd / 23rd April 1945. Later, from August 1945 until 1950, it was a Soviet special (detention) camp. The Soviets used all the facilities except the killing area, the so-called Station Z of the Nazis. Z as the last letter of the alphabet was taken literally by the Nazis, as the absolute end of everything.

From 1950–1960 Sachsenhausen was used by the Nationale Volksarmee (GDR army) as a training camp and material store and many buildings fell into disrepair. Station Z was blown up in 1952 / 53 and the national memorial of the GDR was located on this site from 1961 onwards (MORSCH 1995). The place underwent various structural changes and numerous buildings still existing at that time were demolished. The Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen has been located there since 1993. One of the aims of the memorial is to communicate all aspects of the Nazi concentration camp, the Soviet Special camp and also of the GDR memorial.

The contents of exhibitions and visitors' tours in the memorial had to be revised after 1990 which led to a series of archaeological investigations. The different time levels were meant to remain visible, it being clear that not only structures and findings from the time of the concentration camp would be found.

The excavations covered the area around Station Z (WEISHAUPT 2004). However, it has to be stressed that the killing area, which was built during the winter of 1941–42, the gas chamber, built in 1943, the installations for execution and the crematorium were not directly affected by the excavations. Only a ring foundation was installed in the south-east corner of the new Station Z memorial, leading to the excavation of a certain amount of cremated remains, but of no other structures. Moreover, the former paving of the gas chamber was uncovered, revealing teeth of the victims between the bricks.

The ash deposit was situated behind the crematorium. In this case, the structure connecting the furnaces in the building and the ash deposit was found outside of the complex. The ash from the furnaces was dumped there and after the deposition area was full the cremated remains were dumped in large pits.

Photographs taken in May 1945 show that large deposits of cremated human remains were stored in Station Z. When excavating human remains in former concentrations camps Jewish religious burial customs have to be respected. One of the most fundamental Jewish beliefs, the sanctity of the sleep of the dead, determines that graves last forever. It is forbidden to disturb the Jewish grave in the "house of eternity". This principle is respected as much as possible during excavations in the former concentration camps. It means that anthropological analysis of the cremated or skeletal remains is never carried out and that the remains are quickly re-buried.

In 2006, a large garbage pit was recovered on the site where a museum for the Soviet special camp was planned. In 2000 geophysical survey had re-



Fig. 7. So-called sugar-bowls of the Soviet special camp at Sachsenhausen, where prisoners got small rations of food such as sugar or jam. Many of them are decorated (photograph by Claudia Theune).

Abb. 7. Sogenannte Zuckerdosen vom Sowjetischen Speziallager Sachsenhausen, in denen Häftlinge kleine Essensrationen wie Zucker oder Marmelade aufbewahrten. Zahlreiche weisen Dekorationen auf (Foto von Claudia Theune).

vealed that there was a very large garbage pit of 30x5.6 m and 2–3 m depth at this point. The contents of the pit could not be excavated properly, but an excavating machine brought the contents to the industrial area of the memorial, depositing them in 13 large heaps. The finds were recovered from these heaps in a four-week campaign (THEUNE 2006; MÜLLER 2010). A sorting machine with different strengths screened the material, which was then divided into three smaller groups (Fig. 4): finds of more than 10 cm in size, finds that were 5–10 cm in size and objects smaller than 5 cm. The remaining soil was sieved again through even smaller screens. Small finds such as coins or buttons were collected in this way.

All in all, there were finds with a total weight of 5,556.3 kg. As is often the case in archaeology, a first sorting criterion is the material of the artefacts. The weight of the iron objects was about 3.000 kg, bottles and other glass objects weighed 800 kg and porcelain weighed nearly 300 kg. It soon became clear that these material-based groups were not suitable for the evaluation of camp life or the general circumstances of offenders and victims and instead a functional classification in the following groups was established (MÜLLER 2010, 109 ff.): construction, clothing, toiletries, household, militaria, coins, and other. Each group was further divided into several sub-groups.

The clothing group includes e.g. belts, shoes, buttons or gloves; medical objects such as vials, ampoules, pills, prostheses, medical utensils and similar objects, but also combs, toothbrushes, shaving utensils or eyeglasses belong to the toiletries group. A very wide-ranging group is that of household objects comprising candle sticks, flower pots, plates and dishes, cooking ware and storage vessels, each made of different materials, and also toys, jewellery, smoking accessories, pocket knives and many other accessories. The objects can be ascribed to offenders or victims quite safely. Hand-made combs or small vessels, in particular, doubtlessly belonged to the victims and prisoners. The same applies to most pieces of a considerable number of spoons made of aluminium. Only few forks and knives were found, most of them made of a finer material.

The objects write their own history and are also closely connected to their possessor's biography. If we look at the buildings of the SS, the walls of a concentration camp or the barracks of the prisoners, the plates or dishes of the offenders or the victims or at other finds – all of them embody history and become symbols for the structures and events of terror. Some of the finds belonged to the prisoners. These objects stand for the powerlessness and humiliation of the people imprisoned but sometimes also for their self-asser-



Fig. 8. Georadar map from the hospital camp at Mauthausen with the foundations of the barracks (by Archaeo Prospections®).

Abb. 8. Plan der geophysikalischen Prospektion (Georadar) des Sanitätslager in Mauthausen mit den Fundamenten der Baracken und weiterer Gebäude (Archaeo Prospections®).



Fig. 9. Excavating Barracks No. 6 in the hospital camp of Mauthausen (photograph by Claudia Theune).

Abb. 9. Ausgrabung der Baracke 6 im Sanitätslager von Mauthausen (Foto von Claudia Theune).

Fig. 10. Prisoners' dishes in the hospital camp, Barracks No. 6, Mauthausen (photograph by Claudia Theune).

Abb. 10. Essgeschirr eines Häftlings aus dem Sanitätslager, Baracke 6, Mauthausen (Foto von Claudia Theune).



tion. On the other hand a lot of the artifacts can be related to the perpetrators and therefore have to be interpreted as symbols of their power.

Many objects formerly belonging to prisoners are decorated, some of them allowing an insight into everyday life in the camp (Fig. 5–6). However, many pieces simply have decorative patterns. Still, some of them can hint at whether they were used during the time of the concentration camp, or during the period of the Soviet special camp (Fig. 7). Finds from the special camp in particular are marked with the date. All the finds have now been entered in a database. They are listed under the classifications mentioned, and details such as description, measurements and a picture are added. This database will be used for educational work with pupils and students (THEUNE 2006; MÜLLER 2010).

A similar database was created for the abundant finds from an excavation of a garbage pit in Buchenwald (HIRTE 2000), available online (http://www.buchenwald.de/media_de/fr_content.php?nav=digisammlung&view=ct_digisammlung.html; retrieved December 2010) and in use for educational work in the Buchenwald Memorial. Functional criteria were applied here too. However, these are different from the criteria used to classify the Sachsenhausen finds (camp, international, location, work, health, hygiene, food, jewellery, religion, leisure, function, prisoners, women, children, numbers, name, transport and death).



Fig. 11. The drilling machine at work at the ash heap at Mauthausen (photograph by Claudia Theune).

Abb. 11. Bohrungen im Bereich der Aschehalde in Mauthausen (Foto von Claudia Theune).

Mauthausen

Research in the Austrian concentration camp of Mauthausen has to do with new plans for the memorial. Again, it was necessary to revise the exhibition from the 1970s. The visitors had previously only seen the main camp built in 1938 (BENZ/DISTEL 2006b). The prisoners of the concentration camp had to break granite stones in the nearby quarry for buildings in Linz, Vienna and other locations. Soon after the liberation in May 1945, many areas of the camp and many buildings were torn down. In 1947, the camp was handed over to the Austrian state, with an obligation to build a memorial there (PERZ 2006). At that time, the concept foresaw that the preservation of only the central areas and the parade ground. The other, outer areas were not regarded as



Fig. 12. Drilling core with ash from the ash heap at Mauthausen (photograph by Claudia Theune).

Abb. 12. Bohrkern mit Asche aus der Aschehalde von Mauthausen (Foto von Claudia Theune).

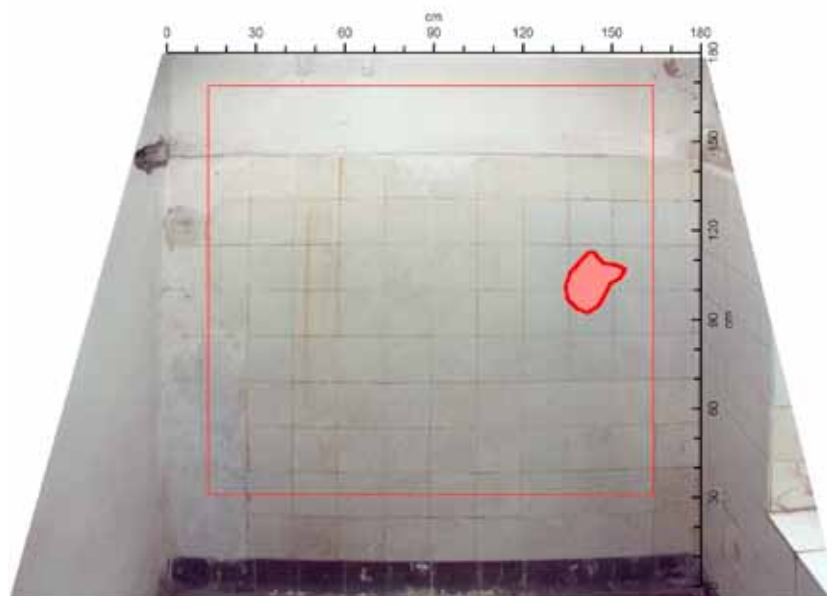
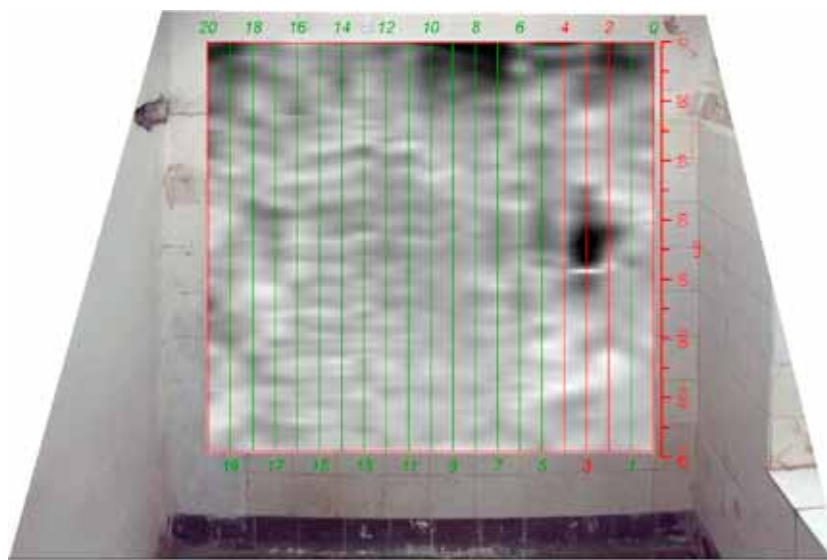


Fig. 13. The anteroom of the gas chamber of Mauthausen with the closed hole of the former gas injection apparatus (Archeo Prospections®).

Abb. 13. Der Vorraum zur Gaskammer in Mauthausen mit dem mit 16 Kacheln verschlossenen Loch, hinter dem die Apparatur der Gaseinführung angebracht war (Archeo Prospections®).

historically worth preservation and were transformed into a park landscape.

It is particularly clear in this case that memorials are not only authentic places, but also memorials, museums and places of learning. Space was very restricted in the concentration camps, it was loud, there was a bad smell, and at least during the final phase, the camps were very dirty. Today the memorials give the impression of being almost clinically clean, and due to wide undeveloped areas they resemble parks.

Aerial photographs from the 1940s clearly show the entire extent of and the lack of space in the camps with their numerous outer areas. Making these outside areas visible again and thus showing the size of the camp is part of the new concept at Mauthausen. First, a comprehensive geophysical survey was carried out in these areas (THEUNE 2010 a; THEUNE 2010 b). This affected the so-called hospital camp, the tent camp and the area of the workshop buildings, where the first firing squad facility was situated. The so-called Camp III will be surveyed in 2011. Geophysical prospection has for instance made visible all foundations of the barracks in the hospital camp (Fig. 8). In the tent camp the location of the tents could also be detected. The traces of the poles can be seen clearly, but the interiors of the tents do not show anomalies.

The first excavation took place in the hospital camp in 2009. As in other former concentration camps, it was necessary to review the condition of the relics in the soil. One end of Barracks No. 6 was excavated (Fig. 9). The foundations were found directly beneath the grass, consisting of large stones and a brick base. Inside, the barrack was divided into three parts. The post-marks were clearly visible. Traces of a stove were also detected and the entrance area was paved carefully. Among the finds are many objects belonging to the building itself, meaning nails and door fittings. Still, some personal items such as dishes of prisoners were uncovered (Fig. 10).

A question to archaeologists raised by historians concerned the so-called ash heap. It was to be investigated how much ash and cremated remains had been placed here. Core drillings were made (Fig. 11) and immediately documented. The finds were recovered and the cores then placed into the ground again without delay (Fig. 12). Larger ash layers were found in the rear of the area than in the front by the path. The area had already been levelled by the Nazis to deposit the ashes and between the ash layers further levelling layers were recorded. The cores also included some finds, such as personal belongings of prisoners.

An important aspect of research in Mauthausen is buildings archaeology. The examination of all standing buildings is planned. One important building was Barracks No. 1. This housed the camp clerks, but also a camp brothel. The walls and ceilings in the sex-cabins had been painted over with a yellow colour in the post-war period, but a colourful decorative scheme, which had visually embellished the brothel, was found under this paint. The NS-period colour scheme has also been discovered under modern layers in many other camp buildings.

Other buildings archaeological investigations took place in the killing area. The gas chamber and the small room in front of the gas chamber where the apparatus to funnel the gas was found are situated here. Different tiles are clearly visible on the wall where the apparatus to funnel the gas was originally installed. A photograph taken shortly after the liberation shows repair work with nine tiles and a hole. Presumably, the Nazis dismantled the device and sealed the hole with these nine tiles. When the Americans wanted to investigate the site, they reopened the place and were also able to see the hole. The site was then closed again with 16 tiles (Fig. 13). Georadar clearly shows this mended hole.

Conclusion

In contemporary historical archaeology, the archaeological heritage of the monuments and memorial sites of the Nazi period is increasingly considered and cared for. The offices for preservation of ancient monuments recognise the importance of these places and sites and carry out excavations when necessary, as is the case at sites of older periods. Much research is carried out in connection with other historical and museological disciplines at the memorial sites. Many valuable insights into the structure of the camps, the crimes and everyday life are obtained by archaeology. Together with other disciplines, they help to analyse the historical image of the camps. Of particular importance is the impact of archaeology in the use of objects for political education. With the help of archaeology, the memorials are sites for learning about National Socialism and the Holocaust.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ivar Schute for valuable information on the research at Amersfoort, and Andrzej Kola on the research at Auschwitz. I also wish to thank Paul Mitchell and Günther Buchinger, who carried out the building archaeology at Mauthausen, for their kind cooperation throughout the work. Ulrike Fornwagner and Paul Mitchell translated the paper.

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Prof. Dr. Claudia Theune
Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte
Universität Wien
Franz-Klein-Gasse 1
A-1190 Wien
E-Mail: claudia.theune@univie.ac.at

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www.histarch.org Claudia Theune | Historical archaeology in concentration camps

Impressum

Imprint:
ISSN 1869-4276

Editing:
Natascha Mehler, Wien

Technical edition and Layout:
Holger Dieterich, Kiel

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