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## Preface

In 2007, whilst conducting research for my master's proposal, I came across a book which contained letters written by members of the Sonderkommando in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Sonderkommando were a group of inmates who were forced to dispose of the bodies of the victims killed by the Nazis in the gas chambers. One letter by Salmen Gradowski, which had been buried in the rubble of the camp, stated:

I have buried this among the ashes where people will certainly dig to find the traces of millions of men who were exterminated.

I was struck by the faith that Salmen and others like him had placed in society and how certain he was that the victims of the Holocaust would be identified. Yet, at that time, I had not heard of any cases where the mass graves of the Holocaust had been excavated by archaeologists. Therefore, I decided to research just how many attempts had been made to locate the victims and sites of the Holocaust in the past. Having trained as a forensic archaeologist, I was shocked to discover that few investigations had been conducted, despite the fact that well-established protocols have emerged in the past 25 years concerning the search for and recovery of victims of genocide. Some investigations were carried out immediately after the Second World War by doctors and lawyers but these surveys were mainly aimed at gathering evidence to prosecute offenders. Thus, the fact that physical evidence existed was confirmed, but detailed examinations of this evidence were not carried out. It was not until the 1990s that several investigations were undertaken by archaeologists and, in recent years, more and more searches for Holocaust sites are being carried out. The majority of investigations to date have focused on excavating or coring at the sites in question and this has caused significant problems due to the disturbance of human remains, something which is strongly discouraged under Jewish Halacha Law. In the absence of a suitable methodology, many Holocaust sites where the victims were predominantly Jewish have not been surveyed and the rabbinical authorities have been reluctant to grant permission for such work in light of the criticisms of these investigations. At other sites, the association, by the public, of archaeology with the search for human remains likely offers another explanation for a degree of wariness and sometimes hostility when archaeological work has been suggested.

The more I engaged with research in Holocaust archaeology, the more I came to realise that it is also the variety of political, social, ethical and

religious sensitivities surrounding this period which have undoubtedly influenced the number of investigations of the physical evidence that have been conducted in the past. Seventy years may now have passed since the end of the Second World War. Yet, whilst the Holocaust may be distant in terms of time, these events exist between history and memory, and continue to have considerable resonance in modern society. Excavation in particular may also be seen as physically and metaphorically digging up painful memories of the past and may bring to the fore particular aspects of the past that some people would rather forget. So it is not as simple as Salmen Gradowski (cited above) hoped to locate the evidence of the Nazis' crimes; in fact it may be forbidden to 'dig to find the traces of millions of men' due to religious stipulations and the sensitivities surrounding this period.

However, because of the variety of novel techniques and approaches now available to archaeologists, the inability to excavate should not inhibit research. In fact, adopting a non-invasive approach to the investigation of these sites opens up the possibility for much more detailed forms of investigation which can potentially locate an abundance of different evidence types. This is providing that, when addressing Holocaust archaeology we, as archaeologists, remember that we are not just dealing with the physical landscape; we have to consider the fact that landscapes have evolved over time and sites have taken on new functions. We are also dealing with contested spaces and memoryscapes where there will be conflicting opinions and memories of where and how events happened. Therefore, any attempts to examine Holocaust sites require a methodology that accounts for these sensitivities.

It was to this end that I developed the Holocaust Landscapes Project. This project began as research for my master's and doctoral theses and continues as an active research project involving staff and students at Staffordshire University, and several international partners. It is an interdisciplinary project which involves the integration of documentary, cartographic and physical evidence, and draws upon techniques from a variety of different disciplines. This book is based heavily on this work and focuses on the lesson learnt in the course of my own investigations at Treblinka extermination and labour camps in Poland, Semlin Judenlager and Anhaltlager in Serbia, and the camps and fortifications on the island of Alderney in the Channel Islands. I also draw on information derived from other sites that I have visited or provided professional advice about in the course of my research, and the work of colleagues working in this field. This book is a timely one as an increasing number of investigations are being carried out by archaeologists and it seems likely that more investigations will be carried out in the future. Its purpose is to consider current approaches to, and possibilities for, the investigation of Holocaust sites and to present novel ways in which investigations may proceed in the future. In a sense, the book is a call to action to archaeologists and a demonstration of potential to those who are custodians of Holocaust sites. Although we may not always be able to 'dig to find the traces of the millions of men (and women)' who were exterminated, by adopting a unique approach to Holocaust archaeology, we can certainly find out more about the lives and deaths of the victims, the experiences of those who bore witness and the actions of those who perpetrated one of the most heinous crimes of the twentieth century.

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