

MMWG

**Task Force for International Cooperation
on Holocaust Education Remembrance and Research**

REPORT

MASS GRAVES AND KILLING SITES IN THE EASTERN PART OF EUROPE¹

Tal Bruttman, historian, City of Grenoble, Mémorial de la Shoah

¹ This report is provided for information purposes only. Statements of fact have been obtained from experts. No representation is made by the ITF as to their completeness, opinion or accuracy. Neither this report, nor any opinion expressed herein, should be construed as an official position of ITF or its Member Countries.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
1. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON THE MASS EXECUTION OF JEWS AND OTHER NAZI VICTIMS IN THE EASTERN PART OF EUROPE AND THE CURRENT STATE OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH	4
A. THE FIRST MASSACRES (1939 – INVASION OF THE USSR)	4
B. THE EASTERN FRONT AND THE GENOCIDE OF THE SOVIET JEWS.....	4
C. THE “FINAL SOLUTION” (FALL 1941-1945).....	5
D. THE EASTERN FRONT AND THE GENERALIZATION OF THE MASSACRES TO THE WHOLE CONTINENT.....	6
E. MAIN ISSUES RAISED.....	6
2 CURRENT SITUATION AND PROJECTS PLANNED REGARDING IDENTIFICATION, MARKING AND PRESERVATION	11
A. LOCATING THE SITES.....	11
B. ASSESSING THE STATE OF THEIR CONSERVATION	16
C. EXHAUSTIVE STUDY OF CURRENT AND PLANNED ACTION BY GOVERNMENTS, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, AND LOCAL AND FOREIGN NGOS.....	17
3 RECOMMENDATIONS	20
APPENDIX: MAIN INTERNET RESSOURCES	31

All the uncredited photos: Tal Bruttman

Introduction

For several years now the topic of the killing sites and mass graves in Eastern Europe, especially those resulting from the Holocaust, has been brought to the attention of public opinion, media and governments.

After being at best neglected or more generally ignored during the Communist era, thousands of mass graves, where lie millions victims of the Holocaust and other crimes committed by the Third Reich and its allies, constitute today not only a major question that need to be addressed by the various countries concerned from a moral point of view, but also from an historical and memorial one.

The topic was known and studied for a long time by scholars, but its importance represents a challenge particularly regarding the memorialization of the sites, and more generally on the matter of Holocaust teaching.

This report was commissioned by the 2010 Chair of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education and Research (ITF) and aims at supporting the works of the MMWG regarding preservation and memorialization of mass graves and killing sites. In accordance with the mission letter of the ITF Chair, Mr. Dan Tichon, the report will deal with the main challenges and obstacles faced as far as preservation of the sites is concerned. For that purpose, it will examine briefly the historical background on the mass execution of Jews and other Nazi victims and the state of academic research, as well as the current situation and projects planned regarding identification, marking and preservation of such sites. The report ends with a set of recommendations on how governments could deal with these historic sites.

1. Brief historical background on the mass execution of Jews and other Nazi victims in the eastern part of Europe and the current state of academic research

Introductory remark: It is an absolute necessity not to differentiate between East and West, but to grasp Nazi Europe as a whole. There were differences regarding chronologies, policies, and degrees of violence varied, but massacres were carried out in all of the territories from East to West and not only in Eastern Europe. Massacres also occurred in Western Europe, especially during the spring/summer 1940 with even more during 1944, not to speak about the “Final Solution,” which was implemented on the entire continent.

A. The first massacres (1939 – invasion of the USSR)

Immediately after the invasion of the country, the German army and the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Polish territory killed several thousand Jews within the very first days of the occupation. In parallel, the Germans started the elimination of the Polish intelligentsia, which led during the first months to the killing of thousands of Polish citizens (e.g., *Aktion Tannenberg's* 20,000 victims). Up to 100,000 people were killed during the first year of occupation.

This first wave of violence was followed by another one on the Western front during the spring 1940. German troops massacred several thousand civilians as well as black soldiers of the French army (several thousands victims, exact numbers still unknown today).

Massacres also occurred in the Nazi sphere of influence, as in Romania, where several pogroms killed hundreds of Jews, before the major pogrom in Iasi (June 29, 1941, more than 13,000 Jews killed) or in Croatia, where minorities (Jews, Gypsies...) were almost immediately targeted after the creation of the NDH.

B. The Eastern front and the genocide of the Soviet Jews

With the invasion of USSR in the summer of 1941 begins a phase of violence and massacres of an unprecedented scale. From that moment, it is necessary to distinguish between what occurs in the course of the Nazis' various repressive policies (destruction of

villages, killing of populations in reprisal operations...) from the various exterminations policies, the first of which was the genocide perpetrated against Soviet Jews as early as the summer of 1941. By the end of 1941 it is estimated that at least 1,100,000 Jews (according to Hilberg) were killed by the *Einsatzgruppen*, police battalions, and various nationalist units operating in the territories of the USSR.

C. The “Final Solution” (fall 1941-1945)

By the end of 1941, the Nazis extended the murder of the Jews across the whole continent under Nazi domination, employing various and often complementary killing methods. Killing centers were built in territories with important Jewish populations. Most of these killing centers served a regional purpose. The most well known are those where poisonous gas was used as the killing method: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz. Only Auschwitz had an “international” mission; the other killing centers were devoted to the destruction of a regional population (the Wartheland’s Jews at Chelmno, the General Government’s for the three others).

But the scholarly and popular focus on the killing “technique” (and because of the Iron Curtain, which led to a lack of information) has hidden the fact that other killing centers existed. The latter were less “modern” in their killing method (shootings were in use), but the goal was the same: the annihilation of the regional Jewish population. Major killing centers were created next to each major city in the territories of the USSR: in the vicinity of Riga (in the Rumbula and Bikernieki forests), Vilnius (Ponary), Minsk (Maly Trostinets), Brest (Brona Gora), Kiev (Babi Yar)...

But this rationalization of the murder of the Jews was only partial as hundreds of thousands died in the ghettos and forced labor camps, due to mistreatment, hunger, diseases, and hundreds of thousands more were killed on the spot by the various units involved in the Holocaust. Often several killing methods were used: in Lviv, part of the population of the ghetto was deported to Belzec, but another part was shot in various killing sites in the city or its vicinity; *Aktion Reinhardt* ended with the mass shooting of the last 60,000 Jews of the General Government; during the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, several thousand Jews were shot to death. In France, as for all the Western part of Europe, the major method used was the deportation to the killing center of Birkenau; however, during the summer 1944, several thousand Jews were shot to death (the most important massacre was committed in the

Lyon region, where more than one hundred Jews were shot on August 21, 1944 at the Bron airport).

D. The Eastern front and the generalization of the massacres to the whole continent.

The massacres carried out by the German troops and their allies (states or collaborationist groups) were not only perpetrated on the Eastern front, but in almost every country, even in those allied to the Third Reich (like Italy) or in satellite states (France).

This spread of violence targeted various population categories. In addition, there was the “opportunity” effect: initially established for and privileged the killing of Jews, the “industrial” killing centers were used periodically by the Nazis to liquidate other groups (Soviet soldiers, Roma, Poles...); similarly, the killing sites were frequently used for the liquidation of other categories, such as at Ponary or Babi Yar.

It should be noted that massacres were also committed by various national groups (Poles and Ukrainians, for example) and politically opposed groups (royalists vs. communists in Yugoslavia or Greece), sometimes without any involvement of the Third Reich, but instead in the context of civil wars extraneous to the Second World War.

E. Main issues raised

At this point, several remarks should be made. First, regarding the question of the mass graves: they were not the results of the killing units only. Six different types, resulting from various Nazi policies, can be distinguished:

- 1) Mass graves generated by the various killing units (*Einsatzgruppen*, police battalions, nationalist groups...). Usually, the victims were forced to dig pits themselves before being killed. These sites were left unmarked on purpose by the perpetrators.
- 2) Mass graves resulting from deaths in the ghettos and various places of detention due to mistreatment, starvation... This kind of mass grave is probably the least well

known and most often forgotten, although they concern the fate of several hundred thousand Jews. In the Warsaw ghetto alone, more than 100,000 Jews died and were buried in various places (especially in the still existing cemetery on Okopowa Street). This was also the fate of thousands of Gypsies who also died in the ghettos, like in Lodz, where they were buried in mass graves in the Jewish Cemetery.

3) Mass graves in the killing centres.

4) Mass graves in the concentration camps. Like those of the killing centres, these were generally located on the perimeter of the camps.

5) Mass graves of people who died/were killed during the death marches.

6) Mass graves resulting from the massacres. One of the goals of the massacres was to bring terror to the populations, and usually the perpetrators did not try to hide them. All the massacres did not generate mass graves, but these places can be seen as *lieux de mémoire*, which have, from a memory perspective, the same signification as the actual mass graves.

Regarding the Holocaust, killings occurred in the soil of almost every country of Europe, and not only in the ex-USSR territories.

Before dealing with the state of current research, it is important to recall the various steps regarding the topic:

- During the war itself, and in the course of the liberation of the Nazi occupied territories, materials and evidence of the crimes committed were collected by various commissions, like the Extraordinary State Commission in the USSR. In almost every country – from Poland to France – such enquiries were made under the authority of the governments. Information and testimonies were also collected by various organizations (especially Jewish organizations) and publications about the fate of victims were made, the most known being probably the work of the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and his *Black Book*.

- Perpetrator trials were held since 1943. First in the USSR, with the Krasnodar trial as early as July 1943, followed by several more at Mariupol, Krasnodon, Kharkov. More specifically the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial (September 29, 1947-April 10, 1948) in Nuremberg, and later in 50's in the Federal Republic of Germany dealt with the question of the mass shootings.
- Historical works, as early as the late '40s, from pioneers like Léon Poliakov, to Raul Hilberg's major work at the beginning of the 60's, which described the role of "mobile killing units" on Eastern Europe.

The question of memory is here central:

- In the USSR, and behind the Iron Curtain more generally, the Jewish victims disappeared from the national historical narrative – the victims became "national" victims (Soviet people in the USSR, Polish in Poland etc.) while in some countries (e.g., Romania) the issue was completely denied. This situation prevailed until the beginning of the 21st century (and in some cases, still persists). The Babi Yar case is one of the best illustrations: its strained emergence during the '60s due to several Soviet intellectuals, the concealment of the Jewish identity of the victims, which appeared only after the collapse of the USSR.
- In the Western countries, knowledge of the events was never neglected, but it was overshadowed by the "industrial" death camps (Auschwitz, Belzec, etc.) for several reasons:

First, Jews from Western Europe and Poland were mainly assassinated there.

Second, these death camps drew attention because of their completely new means of industrializing and rationalizing mass murder, utilizing "modern" techniques (gassing).

There is an absolute need to leave aside the technical aspects (gassings, shootings...) that draw focus to the technique and away from the purpose. The Nazis created at least a

dozen killing centers devoted to the liquidation of regional Jewish populations (except Auschwitz, which had a European mission while, simultaneously, mobile killing squads were operating and using various methods (shootings, gas vans...)).

The result of this “technical” angle on the Holocaust has led to misrepresentation. For instance, in France, the memory – and even historical studies – of the Holocaust is focused on the deportations to Auschwitz. Therefore, all the other victims of the Holocaust in France (those who died in the internment camps, those executed by Germans and French collaborators) are totally forgotten, even from the traditionally cited death toll of the Jews in France during the war, which is confused with the number of deportees. And even the most important massacres have vanished from France’s national memory – in fact, except for the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre, all the massacres committed by the Third Reich in France are mostly forgotten, and historians have only recently started to work on the topic.

The various killing methods should not be confused with the goal, the *Endlösung* or “Final Solution” in the Nazi vocabulary, e.g. the Holocaust. The Holocaust cannot be divided up based on killing methods, which were often used simultaneously.

Since the aforementioned pioneer works, scholars have studied the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, and especially for the last 20 years – the fall of the Iron Curtain resulted in the opening of major archives and led to scholarly exchanges between historians -- there have been a number of very significant works in this field e.g., Omer Bartov, Christopher Browning, Yitzhak Arad, Christian Gerlach, Dieter Pohl, Martin Dean, Alexander Kruglov can be cited as the most important specialists of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.

These works are indeed largely unknown by the public. Nevertheless, the topic has been regularly brought to the public’s attention during the last decades. Testimonies about the mass shootings have been known for a long time (among the most famous are *The Black Book* and the testimony of Leon Wells, a witness at Eichmann’s trial) and the subject is regularly invoked in major works. In his film *Shoah*, for example, Lanzmann integrates Ponary. Christopher Browning’s study of the 101st Police Battalion, whose impact has in fact transcended scholarly circles, treats the subject directly, just like the polemical work of Daniel Goldhagen – and the ensuing debate on the subject also transcended scholarly circles.

Other examples demonstrate that the topic has often been tackled, by one means or another, since the end of the war. In the ’70s, the television mini-series *Holocaust*, which had a major impact when it premiered in the US, dealt with the topic (one episode is named *The Road to Babi Yar*); the museum exhibition produced in the mid-’90s by the Hamburg Institute

for Social Research about the crimes of the Wehrmacht had a major impact in Germany; and more recently, in literature, there has been Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002), which became a movie (2005), and Jonathan Littell's commercially successful and award-winning novel *Les Bienveillantes* (2006).

But it is undoubtedly Father Desbois's work, which has drawn huge attention from the media and public opinion, which has definitely brought to light the situation of the mass graves in Eastern Europe.

Several temptations ensuing from the ongoing works should be pointed out:

- The belief that the ongoing research by the various actors (NGOs...) on the mass graves will allow the re-evaluation of the number of victims (the localization and identification of mass graves does not always provide any information about the number of victims buried: the method used to calculate the number of Jewish victims was the subtraction of the remaining Jewish population after the war from the numbers before the war).
- New interest in the topic should not be confused with historical discovery. Important on their own right, the ongoing works, add to an already important pool of academic knowledge.

In fact, the major input of these inquiries is linked to the situation regarding the Holocaust in several countries: in them, most of the mass graves are not protected or even marked, and furthermore the Jews and their fate remain totally absent from the national memory. The work done by the various organizations gives back a visibility to the mass graves, whose existence was often known, but which had not yet been localized.

2 Current situation and projects planned regarding identification, marking and preservation

a. Locating the sites

While most of the identification and burial of the victims killed during the various massacres committed by the Nazis and their collaborators was done immediately after the liberation and the end of the war in Western Europe, the situation was totally different in Eastern Europe, especially regarding the mass graves of Jews and Gypsies. During the liberation of the Soviet territory, and the advance of the Red Army in Eastern Europe, various commissions investigated the mass graves resulting from the Nazi massacres, and considerable amount of data were collected.

But only a portion of the identified mass graves were protected or even marked. Furthermore, even in those cases, the victims were not clearly named. Instead, Jewish victims were blandly qualified as “innocent Soviet citizens,” “victims of Fascism.” As a result, a large number of the mass graves in Eastern Europe – identified by the various commissions – were neglected and fell into oblivion, until the fall of the Iron Curtain.

During the last few decades and especially during the 20 last years, several initiatives regarding the mass graves question have been launched, but there is still very little information currently available about numbers and locations of the mass graves, and most of it is scattered. Mass graves and massacres were committed all over Europe and yet there is no global perspective — only fragmentary elements.

It should also be noted that since the end of the war, mass graves of Nazi victims are regularly discovered all over Europe – not only in Eastern Europe –, even 60 years after the end of the Second World War. Since the beginning of the new millennium, such discoveries have been made in the Ukraine, like in the village of Gvozdavka-1 (Odessa oblast) when workers digging to lay gas pipelines unearthed a mass grave; in Smoliarka (Belarus); but also in Hegyeshalom (Hungary), where more than a hundred Jews victims of the Death Marches were buried; and even in the Austrian city of Graz. Recently in Germany, attempts were made to locate a mass grave of Jews killed near the former labor camp of Lieberose (Brandenburg).

Even in and near the former concentration camps discoveries of mortal remains are made. At Sachsenhausen in 2004, archaeologists studying a concrete building in the camp

found a layer of ash; several years before, carpenters working on the roof of the crematorium at Buchenwald found hundreds of urns filled with ashes.

Regarding the situation in the Eastern European countries, the knowledge and the perpetuation of memory on the local and national level can be divided in two categories, according to the policy on the topic in each country, especially in the case of the Jewish victims.

- In the countries with a real policy on the matter (one of the best example being Poland), the sites are protected by law, usually marked by memorials and signposts. In this case, the question is whether or not all the mass graves are identified.

- In the countries without a specific policy, memory and knowledge are mainly maintained by the Jewish communities, Jewish organizations (like the Hesed in Ukraine) and organizations specially dedicated to the Holocaust, like Tkuma (Dnepropetrovsk) or the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies (Kiev).

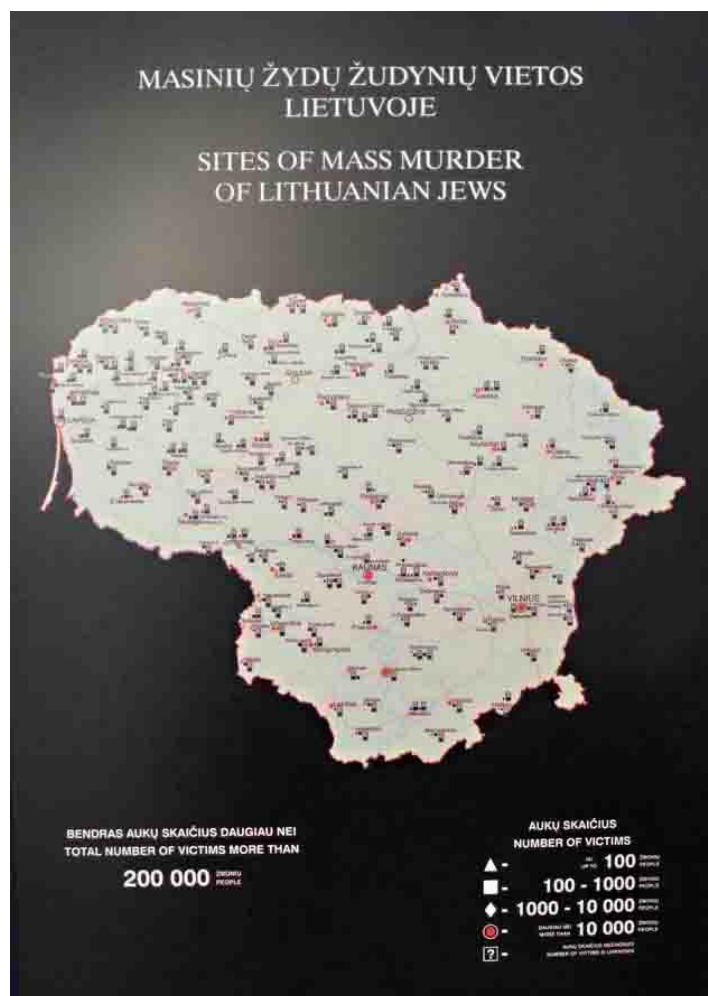


Left: a map of the Holocaust in Transnistria, on display in several Jewish places of the oblast. On the left side of the map, the places, dates and numbers killed.

Right: a map of a part of Western Ukraine, showing some of the ghettos, camps and killing sites also displayed at various location in the Mykolaiev Oblast.

While numerous individual initiatives to erect monuments marking mass graves and massacre sites have been made in Eastern Europe, several important initiatives regarding the identification, marking and protection of the mass graves were launched.

The first major campaign on a large scale was held in the Baltic States, under the authority of the UK Holocaust Educational Trust, due to the initiative of its chairman, Lord Janner of Brownstone QC. The “Baltic Mass Graves Project” led to the identification and signposting of killing sites in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia: in Lithuania, 202 sites were identified and marked in 2003-2004, 100 in Latvia, and 6 in Estonia.



Map on display at the Vilnius Jewish Museum showing the killing sites in Lithuania

Another important work has been carried out under the authority of the United States Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad. In 2005, the Commission published in its report *Jewish Cemeteries, Synagogues, And Mass Grave Sites In Ukraine* a list of the mass graves visited between 1995 and 2000 by the Jewish Preservation Committee of Ukraine. At that time, 495 mass graves were surveyed.²

2. We have reproduced the numbers by region (see appendix I). See in the US Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad report the “Appendix IV: Mass Grave Sites” and “Appendix V: Partial List of Holocaust Memorials in Ukraine” (p. 133-146) which display detailed information.

**Numbers of mass graves, listed by region, visited by
the Jewish Preservation Committee of Ukraine between 1995 and 2000**
(US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, Jewish Cemeteries,
Synagogues, and Mass Grave Sites In Ukraine, 2005)

Oblast (Region)	Mass Graves Surveyed
Cherkaska	27
Chernihivska	15
Chernivetska	7
Dnipropetrovska	4
Donetska	0
Ivano-Frankivska	7
Kharkivska	10
Khersonska	10
Khmelnyska	29
Kyivska	17
Kirovohradska	17
Krymska	0
Luhanska	0
Lvivska	17
Mykolaiivska	30
Odeska	32
Poltavska	12
Rivnenska	32
Sumska	23
Ternopil'ska	9
Vinnytska	84
Volynska	29
Zakarpatska	1
Zaporizka	12
Zhytomyrska	71
Total	495

Two other works regarding the localization of the mass graves on a grand scale need to be mentioned. The first one is the initiative (since 2004) led by Patrick Desbois with his association Yahad-In Unum. One of the association's main goals is the localization of the mass graves of the Jewish victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Eastern Europe and also the collection of testimonies of bystanders. Started in the Ukraine, Yahad-In Unum's inquiries have been extended to Russia, Belarus, and more recently to Poland. A database will soon be online, presenting information collected about the mass graves located, the testimonies and various documents linked to the killing sites. Yahad-In-Unum also created a resource center in Paris in order to put the materials collected at the disposal of researchers.

The second one is the Lo Tishkach European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative. It was established in 2006 as a joint project of the Conference of European Rabbis and the

Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Their goal is the creation of a database of all Jewish burial grounds in Europe, including the mass graves. Various reports regarding European countries have been published so far, along with several estimations about the number of mass graves for several countries: 82 in Germany, 211 in Slovakia, 8 in Estonia, and about 1,200 for the Ukraine.

In September 2009, an announcement was made about another initiative, the “Dignity Return” project, organized by Yuri Kanner, president of the Russian Jewish Congress, in cooperation with Rabbi Marc Schneier, chairman of the World Jewish Congress American Section. The project’s goal is to bury the remains of victims of mass execution from Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine.

Furthermore, in January 2010, the American Jewish Committee has called on the German government to support initiatives to seal and memorialize mass graves in Eastern Europe, which might involve Yahad-In-Unum, Lo Tishkach and the German War Grave Commission.

Almost all the European countries are covered by the work of the various NGOs, except Moldova and the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic.

These various initiatives are, first of all, focused on the memorial aspects, even if they collect huge amount of important data. The NGOs devoted to the question have a common point: they are, in one way or another, religious organizations. None of them was created or is led by scholars. Therefore, their first objective is foremost the preservation of the sites (*travail de mémoire*). To date, there is little quality scholarship resulting from the work of these NGOs.

From a more historical angle, in 2007 Yad Vashem started the project “The Untold Stories - The Murder of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR,” a major online database devoted to the killing sites. This project aims to present for each location, the Jewish community living there, its fate during the war, and the places where its members were killed. Currently, information about more than 200 places is already listed³.

It should also be mentioned that several excavations have been made, since the fall of the Iron Curtain, at killing sites. One of the first was conducted in 1990 in the Ukraine by the Special Investigations Unit of the Australian Attorney-General’s Department in the course of an Australian Nazi war crimes investigation. A mass grave in Serniki was then excavated,

3. See <http://www1.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/homepage.html>

where some 850 Jews were killed in 1942. Since then, several other excavations have been made.

During the investigations about the Jedwabne massacre, the Institute of National Remembrance of Poland led, in 2001, excavations on the site of the pogrom, while in August 2006 an archaeological assessment was carried out in Busk by Yahad-In Unum, at the request of the Mémorial de la Shoah within the framework of the then in production exhibition “The Mass Shootings of Jews in Ukraine: Holocaust by Bullets.” Investigations to locate mass graves have also been carried out in Germany, recently in Jamlitz.

Archaeological investigations were also made at Belzec, under the authority of the Nicholas Copernicus University in Torun in 1997-1999,⁴ and more recently in Sobibor, as a project of the Archaeological Division of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and the Sobibor Museum, with the support of Yad Vashem.

b. Assessing the state of their conservation

This is undoubtedly the strong point of the work of the various groups involved. Their research provides exact knowledge not only on the state of conservation of the sites, but also about their memorialization and marking. Lo Tishkach, in its database, gives the state of conservation for each place. Yahad-In Unum is also collecting information regarding the marking and protection of the sites, and often discovers mass graves whose locations were unknown or even discovers new ones.

On the ground of their ongoing work, Patrick Desbois has communicated the following figures, which clearly show the situation in the Ukraine, regarding the marking of the sites:

Oblast	Killing sites⁵	Memorials	Percentage of sites with Memorials
Crimea	24	20	81%
Ivano-Frankivsk	12	5	42%

4. See Andrzej Kola, *Belżec : the Nazi camp for Jews in the light of archaeological sources: excavations 1997-1999*, Warsaw, Washington, The Council for the Protection of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom/ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000.

5. The number of sites indicated must not be confused with the number of mass graves on each site.

Kherson	7	5	71%
Khmelnyskyi	49	37	76%
Lviv	60	17	28%
Mykolaiv	44	9	21%
Rivne	23	13	57%
Ternopil	21	7	33%
Vinnytsia	21	13	62%
Volyn	28	12	43%
Zaporizhia	11	6	55%
Zhytomyr	25	20	80%
TOTAL	325	164	50%

All the NGO's currently working stated that even in the countries where an important investigation has already been done, other mass graves might be discovered. Furthermore, it appears that even when mass graves are marked, their perimeter is not always properly demarcated. Lo Tishkach estimates in its report on Lithuania that only about 20% of the mass graves are properly demarcated.

c. Exhaustive study of current and planned action by governments, local authorities, and local and foreign NGOs

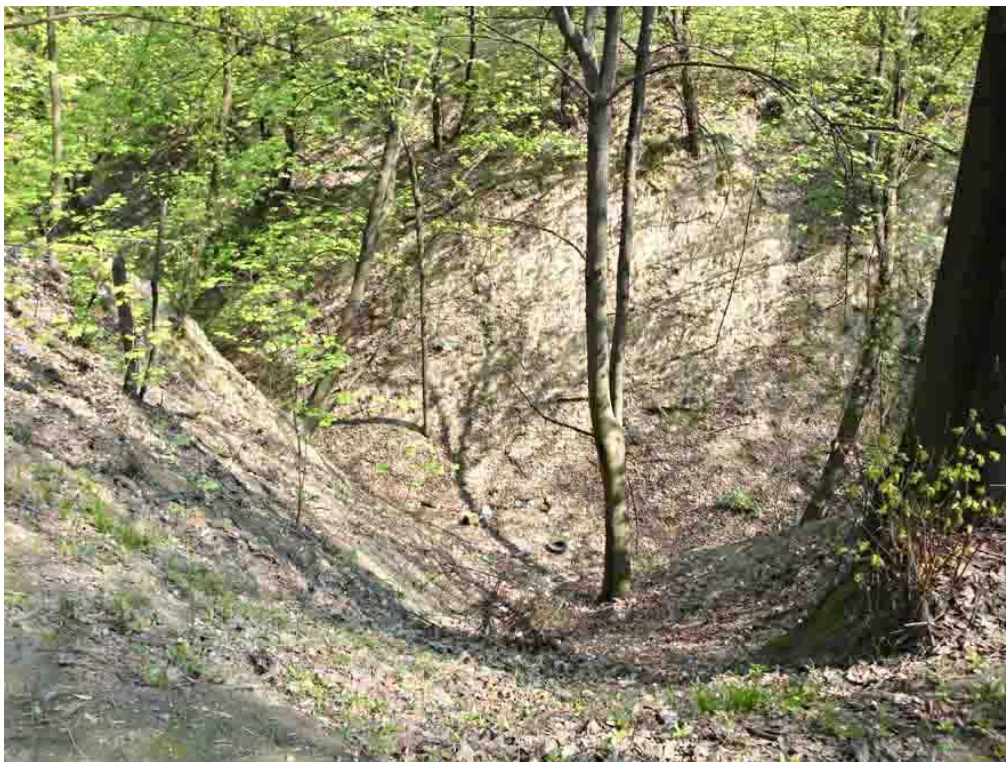
There are no planned governmental actions, especially in the countries where most of the mass graves are left unmarked and unprotected.

While in Poland as already stated the identified mass graves are marked, signposted and protected under the authority of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites (Rady Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa) in the Ukraine, the collection of initiatives (preservation, marking of sites...) comes under the commitment of either individuals (national or foreign), local communities or often foreign organizations. The vast majority, if not all, of the memorials are built on the initiative of private citizens, NGOs, or foreign organizations.

Some major killing sites are still unmarked and unprotected. The most emblematic case is Babi Yar in Kiev, where the killing site (up to 100,000 were murdered there) was turned into a public park during the Soviet period - the Jewish council of Ukraine is currently conducting a museum project on the site.



Babi Yar (April 2009)



Babi Yar (April 2009)



Babi Yar (April 2009)

Outside of the countries directly concerned, it is important to highlight the role of the Commission for the Preservation of American Heritage Abroad, which has already overseen multiple actions in various European countries, especially in Eastern Europe. Moreover, since 1994 the USA has an agreement with the Ukraine regarding the protection and preservation of heritage. This agreement stipulates, among other points, that “Each party will take appropriate steps to protect and preserve the cultural heritage of all national, religious, or ethnic groups [...] who reside or resided in its territory and were such victims of the Second World War. The term ‘cultural heritage’ for the purpose of this Agreement means places of worship, sites of historical significance, monuments, cemeteries, and memorials to the dead, as well as related archival materials.”

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) An inquiry of each European country policy as regard marking, preserving and protecting mass graves.

- 2) Tally the number of victims in each concerned country using the sources available. Currently, there are significant discrepancies in the numbers, depending on the location: calculations are sometimes twice as high from one source to the next for the same site.

In certain cases, only a rather large range of estimates can be provided; however, in other cases, it is possible to arrive at more precise numbers. For example, in France, no absolute number of victims exists, except for the number of people deported, although the sources exist to make this determination (thousands of Jews died in internment camps in France or were executed).

This achievement would be welcome, all the more so because it is currently extremely difficult to obtain coherent numbers. The methods of calculation are glaringly contradictory: some scholarship offers calculations based on existing borders (a good example is the Ukraine), while other scholars use the borders of 1937, 1939, or 1941. Indeed, it turns out that it is exceedingly difficult to have a clear overall view.

- 3) In teaching, promote a better understanding of the killing process. Even if the Third Reich's construction of the five killing centers on the territory of modern Poland constitutes the apogee of the industrialization and rationalization of murder, these centers did not ultimately differ from other places in terms of objectives and functioning. In Eastern Europe, more than a dozen major sites served as points for rounding up and liquidating Jews, from Ponary to Babi Yar, Chelmno to Auschwitz, each with its specific geographic purpose. Places such as Ponary, Bikernieki or Maly Trostinets should appear on the list of killing centers, yet they do not except in very rare cases, e.g., the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* and the database [www. Memorial-museums.net](http://www.Memorial-museums.net) in Berlin mention Maly Trostinets.

4) Furthermore, several scholarly tools could be created under the aegis of one or more key institutions:

- 4.1) Mapping by country, by region, of the mass graves. This could be completed by using Google Earth in the framework of the USHMM's Mapping Initiative.
In this case like in many others, this mapping would not only constitute a useful tool, but it would also demonstrate extent of the killings and break away the focus away from the "industrial" killing centers.
- 4.2) Creation of a database containing each location for all Europe with a killing site or a mass grave and even the locations toward which inhabitants were transferred in order to be executed. The Yad Vashem database, currently in the making for the ex-USSR, could probably be the best instrument for that.
- 4.3) Signage of the sites. For instance Ponary, Rumbula or Bikerniecki are mentioned on tourist maps, but there is no signage near the sites. A first recommendation would be a step in the right direction: you arrive in Ponary but you have no idea where to go, whereas a single sign would suffice; similarly, a sign along the road could indicate the site.
- 4.4) Creation or promotion of written guides of 20 to 50 pages for each of the dozen major killing centers (Chelmno, Sobibor, Ponary, Babi Yar etc.) that connect the given site to the Holocaust, its functioning, the communities destroyed, etc. Organisations concerned may create short brochure for each location which could then be distributed in each city's museums and tourist information offices.

5) But the major action should focus on the sites themselves. In the matter of Holocaust teaching they are of major importance. In his 2006 Holocaust Education report for the Task Force, Lithuania underlined the importance of visiting such sites, stating "that students usually remember visiting these sites for a long time".

Currently, a visit to these places does not contribute to one's understanding of the Holocaust (or other Nazi persecutions). At best, when the sites are memorialized, very little information or explanation is available and there is little to learn except the death toll.

Therefore, highly specialized historical knowledge is required to understand the sites in their current state and, from an educational point of view; there is little interest in visiting them.

5.1) It is crucial that the historical nature of these sites be demonstrated. Therefore, work should be undertaken at the most important killing sites, to create not only places of memory, but also of history, thereby promoting the teaching of the Holocaust and of other crimes committed by the Third Reich. It is out of question to suggest the creation of museums, but rather to provide visitors with valuable information, which will also raise overall public interest in visiting these sites. Birkenau offers an example to follow. Explanatory panels present period photographs, maps, and brief commentaries that offer an historical perspective of what happened there. Visitors can thus have an historical understanding, which is elsewhere completely lacking.

Rumbula killing site entrance



(September 2010)

The engraved stones at the entrance of Rumbula, in Riga. They display a map of the site and the credits for the construction of the memorial. The engraved stones in the background (left) mention the date of the killings and the number of victims, but no other information is available at the site.

Rumbula memorial and some of the mass graves



(September 2010)



(September 2010)

Bikernieki killing site entrance



(September 2010)

Bikernieki memorial



(September 2010)

Bikernieki mass graves



(September 2010)

These places were the killing sites for the Jews of the Riga ghetto and camps. Documents as shown below should be displayed on the site to create the historical link between the places.

View of the Riga ghetto



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-N1212-326
Foto: Donath, Herbert | 1942

(Deutsches Bundesarchiv)

Jews of the Riga ghetto



(United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

Jewish families during deportation from the Kovno ghetto to Riga, 1942



(United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

Various available documents (such as the reports on the killings) or excerpts of testimonies from bystanders or survivors could also be used. In Rumbula, and even more in Bikernieki, it is recalled that thousands of Jews from Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic were killed there. One can read on the memorial the various cities from which they were been deported. But it should be explained that they were deported to the Riga ghetto and Kaiserwald camp. Pictures of some of these deportations exist, like the one below.

Deportation of Jews of Bielefeld, December 13, 1941



(Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz)

Deportation of Jews of Muenster, Germany, December 13, 1941



(Yad Vashem)

5.2) Signs should be put directly on the site, in front of the most important places, displaying detailed information and reproductions of photos and documents. For instance in Ponary, a map explaining the various places can be found on the wall of the small museum, but nowhere else. Therefore when one is in front of the different pits or monuments, there is no information explaining site's significance.



Map of the site, Ponary (September 2010)

For the vast majority of these places, there is not much to see, except the mass graves and the memorials - when there are graves or memorials. This is easy to explain. Given their purpose, there were – at best – almost no structures at these places, and the few existing were dismantled by the Nazis once the “spot” stopped being used for killings (like in Ponary), or they were destroyed after the war (like in Kiev, where the Syrets camp near the Babi Yar was destroyed after being used for Germans POW). Moreover, for various reasons, some sites underwent major modifications after the end of the war: the ground was leveled, or worse, like in Babi Yar, a large part of the site has been turned into a public park with playgrounds.

For instance, in the Ponary case, for which (like an important number of killing sites) there are photographs taken during the war, the transformations appear clearly:

One of the six pits in Ponary today



(September 2010)

The two pictures below shows the pits during the war and immediately after the liberation:



(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research)



5.3) Another important point regarding the killing sites is their localization. The infamous “industrial” killing centers are situated far from the major cities: Treblinka is 100km or an hour and a half from Warsaw; Auschwitz is one hour from Krakow; Belzec and Sobibor are both a two-hour drive from Lublin. On the contrary, most of the killing sites – and some of the most important – are in the direct vicinity of major cities, or even within current city limits, due to postwar urban sprawl. While visiting cities like Riga, Vilnius, Kaunas, Minsk, Kiev or Lviv, which were major centers of Jewish life, a killing site is only 10 to 30 minutes away from the city center.

Appendix

Main internet resources

MAIN ORGANISATIONS

US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad

<http://www.heritageabroad.gov/>

Lo Tishkach – European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative

<http://www.lo-tishkach.org/en/>

Yahad-In Unum

<http://www.holocaustbybullets.com/>

DATABASES

Yad Vashem “The Untold Stories - The Murder of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR”

<http://www1.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/homepage.html>

Lo Tishkach Database of European Jewish Burial Ground

<http://www.lo-tishkach.org/en/index.php?categoryid=14>

The International Jewish Cemetery Project, by the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies

<http://www.iajgsjewishcemeteryproject.org/eastern-europe/index.html>

Sites of massacres in Lithuania, The Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum

<http://www.jmuseum.lt/index.aspx?Element=ViewArticle&TopicID=256&ArticleID=3188>

EXHIBITIONS AND INFORMATIONS ABOUT INVESTIGATIONS

Mémorial de la Shoah “Holocaust by Bullets” Exhibition

http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/upload/minisites/ukraine/en/en_exposition1.htm

Sydney Jewish Museum: Presentation of the excavations on Serniki Mass Grave

<http://www.sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au/Collection/Rubber-Boot/default.aspx>

Yad Vashem page about the excavations at Sobibor

http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/institute/sobibor_excavations.asp

Report about the archaeological investigations at Belzec

<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ar/modern/archreview.html>