

---

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska

---

## Infrastructures of Holocaust Mass Graves: Work-in-Progress in Tylawa

---

TEKSTY DRUGIE 2023, NR 1, S. 183–204

DOI: 10.18318/td.2023.en.1.14 | ORCID: 0000-0003-0383-4652

In summer 2021, I was hiking in the Low Beskids, a mountain chain in the Polish part of the Western Carpathians. In the village of Tylawa, I noticed a road sign saying, “Jewish grave 500 m.” I turned into a sandy road and soon saw another road sign: “Jewish grave 100 m.” It pointed to a path leading to a monument that indicated a mass grave with a plaque in the center informing about over 500 Jews from the towns of Dukla and Rymanów whom the Germans had murdered there on August 13, 1942 (Fig. 1). What might be considered a mere coincidence was certainly more than that: ever since the 2000s, Polish scholars, most prominently Ewa Domańska, Zuzanna Dziuban, Jacek Małczyński, and Roma Sendyka, have pointed our attention to the epistemic consequences of living in landscapes of violence, filled with human remains.<sup>1</sup> Knowing their works, I – at first rather intuitively

---

**Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska** – a sociologist and cultural scholar, director at the German Historical Institute Warsaw and Professor at the Institute of Contemporary Culture at the University of Lodz. Her research focuses on cultural memories in Poland and Germany. Among her publications are *Microhistories of Memory. Remediations of the Holocaust by Bullets in Post-War Germany* (2023). Her contributions have appeared in *Memory Studies*, *The Public Historian*, and *German Studies Review*. Email: sekretariat@dhi.waw.pl.

---

1 Jacek Małczyński, “Drzewa ‘żywe pomniki’ w Muzeum – Miejscu Pamięci w Bełżcu” [Trees as “living monuments” in the Bełżec site of memory], *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2009); *Mapping the “Forensic Turn.” Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, ed. Zuzanna Dziuban (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2017); Ewa Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała* [Nekros. Introduction to the ontol-



Fig. 1. Monument in Tylawa, general view, April 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

– recognized the importance of the place, which made an immediate impression on me. Since then, I have visited Tylawa six times, analyzed archival sources, and conducted interviews.

Tylawa is just one of many places like it in Poland. At the time of writing (April 2023), I have examined 12 other monuments of Jewish mass graves in the Low Beskids, and there are still hundreds (it is hard to estimate how many hundreds) more mass graves to study across Poland. The 12 mass graves, which I have been working on in the last months, are the burial sites of at least 5,000 people.<sup>2</sup> Despite the desideratum to study mass graves from the Holocaust in Poland, this essay is only about my initial encounter with the topic,

---

ogy of dead bodies], (Warszawa: PWN, 2017); *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2) (2020), special issue "The Environmental History of the Holocaust," ed. Jacek Małczyński, Ewa Domańska, Mikołaj Smykowski and Agnieszka Kłos; *Nie-miejsca pamięci* [Non-sites of memory], vol. 1 and 2, ed. Roma Sendyka, Maria Kobielska, Jakub Muchowski and Aleksandra Szczepan (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2020); Roma Sendyka, *Poza obozem. Nie-miejsca pamięci – próba rozpoznania* [Beyond the camp. Non-sites of memory. Diagnosis] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2021).

2 Apart from Tylawa, among the places under my scrutiny are mass graves in Biała Niżna, Bobowa, Brzozów, Grybów, Hałbów, Jasienica Rosielna, Jasło, Kołaczyce, Przeczyca, Rzepiennik, Stróżówka, and Warzyce.

which happened to be in Tylawa. At the same time, it is evidence of an ongoing work-in-progress rather than an evidence-based journal article. The research is part of a larger project about “infrastructures of memory.” Within this approach, mass graves can be considered multilayered funeral infrastructures.

Inspired by Jacek Leociak’s concept of the “post-ghetto-site,” Sendyka advocates for the notion of “post-camp-site,” while scrutinizing the nature and matter left from KL Plaszow in Krakow. In a broader sense, she means “places that are marked by a traumatic past,”<sup>3</sup> which also applies to places such as Tylawa – they can be referred to as “post-killing-sites.” In Poland, small and mid-sized “post-killing-sites” remain poorly visible, especially against the backdrop of many research projects devoted to post-camp-sites and post-ghetto-sites and of some work done on non-sites of memory (i.e. sites not/hardly commemorated).<sup>4</sup> Unlike the latter, the post-killing-sites I am investigating are marked in space by means of monuments or memorial plaques. Their rather simple and unspectacular aesthetics may be among the reasons for overlooking them in memory studies. Only the (not so recent) “turns” towards the matter, forensics, environment, and climate resulted in the rediscovery of killing-sites. At the same time, however, the mere existence of a monument or plaque does not mean that anyone really commemorates the pertinent events.<sup>5</sup>

### Who Remembers What and How (and Where)?

Following Reinhart Koselleck’s idea that memory scholars should answer three questions – Who remembers? What is remembered? How is it remembered?<sup>6</sup> – I soon realized that in Tylawa I had no good answers for any

3 Roma Sendyka, “uGruntowana pamięć” [Grounded memory], *Krzysztofor* 38 (2020): 271; Roma Sendyka, Andrzej Stępnik, Bogusław Szmygin, Robert Traba and Anna Ziębińska-Witek, “Debata wprowadzająca: Czym jest miejsce po obozie? Znaczenia, funkcje, konteksty” [Introductory debate: What is a post-camp-site? Meanings, functions, contexts], in *Historia w przestrzeniach pamięci. Obozy – “miejsca po” – muzea* [History in spaces of memory. Camps – “post-sites” – museums], ed. Tomasz Kranz (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2021).

4 Sendyka, *Poza obozem*, Chapter 1 (“Zrozumieć nie-miejsce pamięci”).

5 In the context of southeastern Poland, see Sławomir Kaprański, “(Nie)obecność Żydów w krajobrazach pamięci południowo-wschodniej Polski” [The absence of Jews in the mnemonic landscapes of southeastern Poland], *Sensus Historiae* 9 (4) (2012); Jacek Nowak, Sławomir Kaprański and Dariusz Niedźwiecki, *On the Banality of Forgetting: Tracing the Memory of Jewish Culture in Poland* (Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, 2018).

6 Reinhart Koselleck, “Formen und Traditionen des negativen Gedächtnisses” [Forms and traditions of negative memory], in *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit*

of them. Later, I concluded that a fourth question should be added: where is it remembered? Ever since the publication of Tim Cole's book *Holocaust Landscapes*, we know that the Holocaust was not just a historical but also a spatial event.<sup>7</sup> The same applies to the memory of the Holocaust. It makes a difference whether a mass killing is commemorated in the forest, where it actually took place, or in another place – for example on the road to the forest, which is the case of the monument in Brzozów, 45 km northeast of Tylawa.

The answer to the question “What is remembered?” in Tylawa proved challenging, although the inscription on the plaque provides the basic information: on August 13, 1942, the Nazi Germans killed over 500 Jews from Dukla and Rymanów. However, as in the case of many other mass shootings, the specific circumstances of this murder remain unclear. August 1942 was the peak time of Operation Reinhardt, whose objective was to murder all Polish Jews. Whilst most of the Jews from the Low Beskids were deported to Bełżec, some others were shot on the spot. In her book on the Holocaust in the Krakow district, Elżbieta Rączy mentions the massacre in Tylawa: “On August 13, the Germans resettled the Jews from Dukla. After the selection, 100–400 people were taken to the Błudna [name of a local hill – author's note] forest, nearby Tylawa, and shot there; over 200 people were designated for two work camps. Others, i.e. about 1,600 people, were deported to Bełżec.”<sup>8</sup> Given the fact that Rączy's monograph covers the whole Krakow district, where dozens or even hundreds of similar events took place, it is understandable that she devotes only three sentences to this particular massacre. Other overview publications, among them a book by Dariusz Libionka, do not describe particular mass shootings at all. Writing about Operation Reinhardt, Libionka states: “The scenario of all deportations was the same everywhere: the brutal concentration, selection and finally deportation to Bełżec or to a forced labour camp. [...] The final deportation took place after a couple of weeks, sometimes a couple of months. The Jews were murdered on the spot or deported. [...] Auxiliary work was delegated to firefighters and the *Baudienst*. Their role was especially significant in smaller towns.”<sup>9</sup> What is certainly true from the macro-perspective, as adopted by Rączy and Libionka,

---

*Holocaust und Völkermord* [Remembering crimes. Coming to terms with the Holocaust and Genocide], ed. Volkhard Knigge and Norbert Frei (München: Beck, 2002). I am grateful to Katrin Still for reminding me of this seminal text some years ago.

7 Tim Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

8 Elżbieta Rączy, *Zagłada żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim w latach 1939–1945* [The Holocaust in the Krakow District from 1939 to 1945] (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo IPN, 2014), 273.

9 Dariusz Libionka, *Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie* [The Holocaust in the General Government] (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2017), 161.

raises many questions when analyzed micro-historically, at the level of one particular place.

Even more challenging are the answers to the questions “How is it [the mass shooting – M. S.] remembered?” and “Who remembers it?” In the governmental database listing places labelled as “war graves”<sup>10</sup> we read about Tylawa: “In the Błudna forest there is a mass grave of Jews, inhabitants of Dukla and Rymanów, murdered by the Nazis. A concrete frame surrounds the grave which is filled with soil. In the center, there is a large pedestal with a marble plaque [...]. The inscription is written in two languages. The current form was made in 1984, during a general renovation.”<sup>11</sup> Except for the last sentence (which, by the way, I could not confirm), the database offers only information that is visible on site anyway. There is even an error, as the plaque is made of granite, not of marble. Characteristic is the use of the passive voice and impersonal verbs: the grave is filled (Pol.: *wypelnione*) with soil; the inscription is written (*wyryto*); the form was made (*wykonano*) in 1984. We receive no information about the people who filled the grave with soil, who wrote the inscription, and who made the form. Even more difficult to investigate is the monument’s later history. I am still in the process of finding out who (how and why) renovated it and who (how and why) took care of it.

### Excursus: Infrastructure Studies

In their groundbreaking essay “How to infrastructure,” Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker suggest that “infrastructures” are more than just pipes, cables, or transmitters, that is structures “beneath” (Lat.: *Infra*) other systems.<sup>12</sup> They are practices (hence their use of the word “infrastructure” as a verb) rather than objects. As with other concepts from Science and Technology Studies, such as “network” or “black box,” the role of the researcher is to disclose the hitherto invisible systems of actions. The encounter between individuals and infrastructures is mutual: individuals determine infrastructures, not least because they design them, but infrastructures also determine individual actions. Star and Karen Ruhleder therefore point to the following “dimensions” of infrastructures: they are a) transparent and usually b)

10 For southeastern Poland (Subcarpathian Voivodeship) see <https://mpn.rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/>.

11 War Graves Database, accessed May 3, 2023, [https://mpn.rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/?resting\\_place=barwinek-mogila-zbiorowa-zydow-ofiar-terroru](https://mpn.rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/?resting_place=barwinek-mogila-zbiorowa-zydow-ofiar-terroru).

12 Susan L. Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker, “How to Infrastructure,” in: *Handbook of New Media*, ed. Leah A. Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (London: Sage, 2002). Many thanks to Gabriele Schabacher, Tom Ullrich, and Franziska Reichenbacher who taught me how to infrastructure.

become visible under breakdown; they are c) linked with “conventions of practice,” and d) standardized; they e) reach beyond one-site practices and are therefore f) embedded in other infrastructures, social arrangements and technologies.<sup>13</sup>

Especially in German humanities, the notion of infrastructures is often discussed along with the concept of “cultural technique” (*Kulturtechnik*). The term itself is rooted in agriculture and appeared first in the late nineteenth century to mean “environmental engineering.”<sup>14</sup> In the 1970s, “cultural technique” became one of the central notions of German media and culture studies. In the early 2000s, Thomas Macho added a temporal dimension to the debate: “Cultural techniques – such as writing, reading, painting, counting, making music – are always older than the concepts that are generated from them. People wrote long before they conceptualized writings or alphabets.”<sup>15</sup> Recently, Bernhard Siegert expanded the concept by arguing that cultural techniques are practices that reach beyond media. “They concern cultural-archaeological processes describing culture in layers far below the discourses of pedagogy, the university, and techniques of reading and writing; [...] the concept of cultural techniques concerns the primary process of articulation as such.”<sup>16</sup> Memory work therefore seems an elementary cultural technique. Following Macho, we can say that people had commemorated the past long before they conceptualized commemoration.

Similarly to theoreticians of cultural techniques, infrastructure scholars also focused at first on media technologies, before their concept developed towards a more general model. In their book *Sorting Things Out*, Bowker and Star think of infrastructures as means of organizing human activity.<sup>17</sup> For example, filling in the sections on ID cards becomes a practice of racial classification; the questions, which Bowker and Star raise in relation to apartheid, are

13 Susan L. Star and Karen Ruhleder, “Steps Toward an Ecology of Infrastructure: Design and Access for Large Information Space,” *Information System Research* 7 (1) (1996): 113.

14 Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, “Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 30(6) (2013): 5.

15 Thomas Macho, “Zeit und Zahl. Kalender- und Zeitrechnung als Kulturtechniken,” in *Bild – Schrift – Zahl*, ed. Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp (München: Fink, 2003), 179; English wording quoted from Winthrop-Young, *Cultural*, 8.

16 Bernhard Siegert, “Attached: The Object and the Collective,” in *Cultural Techniques. Assembling Spaces, Texts & Collectives*, ed. Jörg Dünne et al. (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

17 Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan L. Star, *Sorting Things Out. Classification and Its Consequences* (Boston: MIT Press, 2016).

equally relevant for Holocaust studies. Bowker therefore suggests adopting infrastructure studies for memory studies: “memory is a hyphenated phenomenon, a material-semiotic one,” he says.<sup>18</sup> He invites us to “think about the phenomenology of forgetting/remembering both the material and the semiotic in the same moment” and explains: “this is where the hyphenation comes in.” He further expresses his “standard regret in memory work that the natural world is left more or less untouched by the analysis – so that the material-semiotic analysis can too easily drift into phenomenology and avoid ontology.”<sup>19</sup> Written in 2009, these words sound too harsh now, as numerous memory scholars have worked on the environmental aspects of forgetting/remembering ever since.<sup>20</sup> However, I argue that infrastructure studies, especially the approach which Bowker and Star call “infrastructural inversion,” may still prove useful. “Infrastructural inversion” is a “struggle against the tendency of infrastructure to disappear (except when breaking down). It means learning to look closely at technologies and arrangements that, by design and by habit, tend to fade into the woodwork (sometimes literally!). Infrastructural inversion means recognizing the depths of interdependence of technical networks and standards, on the one hand, and the real work of politics and knowledge production on the other.”<sup>21</sup>

What is the value of adapting infrastructural inversion for my research on post-killing-sites? The method directs attention towards the material circumstances in which the Holocaust and its remembrance took place. Infrastructural thinking requires looking at things in a microscale – in the case of Holocaust studies, radical zooming-in at objects helps us to understand “the processes underlying how it [the Holocaust – M. S.] unfolded.”<sup>22</sup> Analyzing the memory of the mass shootings as a cultural technique includes questions of locating the monuments at particular places or transporting stone plaques. Who made the effort to carry these extremely heavy materials, and how? Following the premises of infrastructural inversion, I trace the “technologies and arrangements” of the mass shootings and their remembrance

18 Geoffrey C. Bowker, “Afterword (Memories Are Made of This),” *Memory Studies* 2 (1) (2009): 119. See also Geoffrey C. Bowker, *Memory Practices in the Sciences* (Boston: MIT Press, 2008).

19 Bowker, *Afterword*, 120.

20 See works listed in footnote 1, among others.

21 Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 34

22 Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman, “Introduction. Toward a Microhistory of the Holocaust,” in *Microhistories of the Holocaust*, ed. Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman (New York–Oxford: Berghahn, 2017), 8.

backwards. Especially important in the context of my research are spatial arrangements.<sup>23</sup> I apply a reverse reading of the places from their present condition to their initial moment in 1942. In addition, this approach is inspired by Koselleck's idea of the "sediments of time."<sup>24</sup> I proceed top-down (starting with the youngest layer), instead of bottom-up (from the oldest layer onwards). As in any multilayered structure, the monument in Tylawa is one entity with its continuous history reaching from the mass shooting in 1942 until today. The division of my arguments below into "infrastructures of mass shooting" and "infrastructures of memory" is therefore only for analytical purposes. In fact, they build one network.

### Infrastructures of Memory

In Tylawa, a path paved with concrete blocks leads from the sandy road to the monument, marked by a 25 x 5 meter rectangle surrounded by a concrete wall around 30 cm high. In the middle stands a trapezoidal prism of about



Fig. 2. Monument in Tylawa, side view with visible cracks, April 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

80 x 40 x 120 cm and covering a black granite plaque. For the visitor, the wall and prism demarcate the borders of the commemoration space. It is within this space that standardized cultural techniques of remembrance, such as placing stones (by Jewish visitors) or laying flowers (by Christian visitors), take place. In this context, the close relationship between "cultural technique" and "environmental engineering," that is taking control over the natural environment, becomes best visible – the spatial organization of the mass grave enables us to immediately

23 Gabrielle Schabacher, "Mobilizing Transport: Media, Actor-worlds, and Infrastructures," *Transfers* 3 (1) (2013).

24 Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2018).



recognize the border (a key concept of infrastructure studies<sup>25</sup>) between the remembrance site and its surroundings. When I first visited Tylawa, the area was already tidy and mown; yet the plaster on the monument was partly off and the wall cracked (Fig. 2). Quite obviously, it was natural forces rather than humans that caused the damage. In accordance with the concept that the infrastructures become visible upon their breakdown, the mere existence of the cracks directed my attention to the surface on which they appeared – it was a specific type of concrete, called *lastryko* in Polish, often used under communism.

The inscription on the plaque says, in Polish and in Hebrew: “In the common grave rest over 500 Jews from Dukla and Rymanów who died a martyrs’ death at the hands of German murderers on 13 August 1942. May their memory be a blessing.” Below, it contains the information that the monument was founded by the Jewish Committee of Dukla, designed by J. Jędrusik from Dukla, and built by J. Piróg from Lipowica (Fig. 3). In comparison with other mass graves, the one in Tylawa is very informative. Although the inscription does not say when the monument was built, a close reading of the place suggests that it is an early post-war commemoration because the Jewish committees ceased to exist by the early 1950s. In addition, we see the remains of another inscription on the reverse side of the plaque (Fig. 4). Apparently, the monument was made of an old matzevah, hence under extreme shortages; otherwise, the founders would not have recycled the material from another grave. By no means was this an exception; I found recycled matzevot on the site of at least four other mass graves.



Fig. 3. Monument in Tylawa, plaque and inscription, April 2022. M. Saryusz-Wolska.

25 Susan L. Star, “This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept,” *Science, Technology & Human Values* 35 (5) (2010).



Fig. 4. Monument in Tylawa, reverse side of the plaque, April 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

A quick internet search reveals that the local association Shtetl Dukla cares for the place. I therefore contacted the head of the organization, Jacek Koszczan, who, as it turned out, knew the history of the place only partially. In his narrative, the monument was erected soon after the war and has been maintained by his association since about 2010.<sup>26</sup> What had happened in between, he did not know. My first interview with Koszczan alone disclosed the embeddedness of memory work with other social arrangements: he used to be an immigration officer on the Polish-Slovakian border; after retirement, he started preserving the Jewish heritage of Dukla and himself sponsored many of these activities, such as mowing the grass at the Jewish cemetery. In 2016, the Law and Justice party government reduced to a minimum the pensions of former members of the “uniformed service” (army, police, border defense etc.) who had served in communist Poland. Koszczan (who, in the meantime, won a lawsuit against the government) was left without financial resources to sponsor his association’s work. For the next years, inmates at the local prison mowed the grass as part of their resocialization work. In 2022, the municipality of Dukla granted a small amount of money to prepare the monument in Tylawa for the ceremony of the 80th anniversary of the massacre. As the grant proved insufficient, the local stonemason volunteered to do

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Jacek Koszczan, April 20, 2022.

the work.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly enough, he is the grandson of a woman who hid the local rabbi during the war and was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in 2014. This biographical detail once again reveals the embeddedness of mnemonic networks.

Thanks to the inscription on the plaque, the beginnings of the monument in Tylawa are much easier to trace than its later history. On November 9, 1948, seven men, survivors from Dukla, founded the Jewish Committee of Dukla,<sup>28</sup> hence the monument was probably erected after this meeting. Consequently, archival records state that the monument is from 1949.<sup>29</sup> Google Maps displays an undated but obviously old photograph of the monument<sup>30</sup>: the granite plaque is the same as today, but the prism is not yet covered with *lastryko*. The fenced area is smaller than today, and instead of the small wall there is barbed wire on wooden posts. The inhabitants of one of the neighboring villages claimed that the wall and the *lastryko* had been added in the 1960s.<sup>31</sup> Mushroom pickers whom I met in the forest told me that the monument had been enlarged no sooner than in the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> It is possible, however, that it was only in 1984, as the entry in the governmental database suggests.<sup>33</sup> A “professional” witness, who had given many interviews to journalists and researchers, claimed even that the change was from the late 1990s, when another, much smaller grave, was discovered in the close vicinity.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of the actual date, there is no doubt that the place was changed at least once, probably even twice, between its erection and the first activities of Shtetl Dukla.

---

27 Interview with Koszczan, July 6, 2022.

28 Protokół zebrania organizacyjnego obywateli wyznania mojżeszowego pochodzących z miasta Dukli, celem utworzenia Komitetu żydowskiego w Dukli [Minutes of the meeting of Jewish citizens from Dukla in order to establish a Jewish Committee in Dukla], AP Sanok 60/1188/51.

29 ROPWiM inventory card [karta ewidencyjna], AAN 2/3955/0/1/188, k. 60; Cemetery Card [karta cmentarza], archives of the Office for the Preservation of Monuments in Krosno, no reference.

30 Photograph of the grave in Tylawa, Google Maps, accessed May 3, 2023, <https://goo.gl/maps/Tuw7mss034JTFzU47>.

31 Interview with Mr and Mrs G., October 15, 2022.

32 Author’s research diary, entry from October 15, 2022.

33 War Graves Database, accessed May 5, 2023, [https://mpn.rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/?s=Tylawa&resting\\_place\\_category=zbiorowa-mogila-wojenna&p=3435](https://mpn.rzeszow.uw.gov.pl/?s=Tylawa&resting_place_category=zbiorowa-mogila-wojenna&p=3435).

34 Interview with H., July 18, 2022, provided by Koszczan.

| A   | B | C | D | Barwinek /Błudna/   |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 2. Oznaczenie wergifikacyjne  |   |   |   | 7. Powiat <u>Krosno</u><br><u>Stacja Dukla</u><br>Gmina                   |  |
| 3. Data upamiętnienia<br><u>13.VIII.1942r</u>   |   |   |   | 4. Data i rodzaj upamiętnienia<br><u>Pomnik 1949r.</u>                    |  |
| 5. Opis historyczny<br>W dniu 13 sierpnia 1942. Niemcy wysiedlili z Dukli i Rymanowa około 500 Żydów i rozstrzelali ich we wsi Barwinek/"Błudna". Na miejscu straceń znajduje się pomnik. |   |   |   | 6. Dojazd <u>stacja kolejowa 26km</u><br><u>Stacja PKB. Barwinek 1 km</u> |  |
| Pien  |   |   |   | 9. Właściciel terenu i jego adres<br><u>Państw. Fundusz Ziemi.</u>        |  |
|   |   |   |   | 10. Patronat sprawuje<br><u>Szkoła Ogólnokształcąca w Dukli.</u>          |  |
|   |   |   |   | 11. Nr rejestru   |  |
|   |   |   |   | 12. Dane hipoteczne i katastralne   |  |

Fig. 5. Cemetery Card [karta cmentarza], archives of the Office for the Preservation of Monuments in Krosno.

Two standardized records in the Office for the Preservation of Monuments mention the monument in Tylawa. The first is from 1963 (and includes an additional, handwritten annotation from 1979), and the second is from 1996. None of these documents refers to any renovations or changes, although this is because of their standardized form. They are cardboard sheets with 23 spaces in which the inspectors are asked to provide information about the commemorated event, the location of the inspected place, and its current condition; the inspector should also give suggestions for future work (Fig. 5). Thus, the infrastructural logic of monument preservation bears at least partial responsibility for the scarce data on the history of the monument. Using Bowker and Star's phrase, we can say that it has been "sorted out." Meticulous analysis of the records suggests only that the renovation in Tylawa must have taken place between 1979 and 1996. If documentation of this renovation exists at all, I am yet to find it.

Is the discussion of the possible renovations of the mass grave not just hairsplitting? According to infrastructure studies, it is not, because only detailed analysis reveals the entanglements between humans and physical matters. It is the materiality of the monument, rather than the interviews and the documents, which discloses that individuals and/or communities have taken care of the place over the last eight decades. Otherwise, plants would have overgrown it to an extent that the monument would not be visible today.

The inspectors from the Preservation Office filled in the forms very vaguely, sometimes just copying existing information, and took no accurate measurements, although they should have. Similarly abnegating was my interviewees' attitude to the post-war history of the place. They obviously lacked interest in it and referred to the alleged renovations only when I repeatedly asked about them. Apart from the issue with the renovation(s), several other questions require answers. The record from 1963 mentions that the school in Dukla was in charge of tidying up the monument (no evidence in the school chronicle could be found), whereas the record from 1996 mentions "an inhabitant of the village." Local people suggested H., whose older brother witnessed the massacre, but H. denied this.<sup>35</sup>

In light of these divergent sources and contradictive information, the mere materiality of the place proves enlightening. Cutting several trees (the stumps are still visible), transporting bricks for the wall and concrete for covering the monument with *lastryko*, and, finally, paving the path with 30 standardized concrete plates measuring 100 x 300 x 15 cm have been cost-intensive and visible actions in the small village of Tylawa. It is very telling that local people no longer know when (not even in which decade) these actions took place. The material structure of the monument also stands for cultural techniques of commemorating the dead. Despite the *matzevah*, on which Jewish visitors lay the stones, the place mirrors funeral infrastructures that are rather typical of Christian graves: with enough space for laying flowers. Also typical of Christian graves is the small concrete wall surrounding a rectangle filled with soil. Although there are no immediate Christian symbols on the grave, the spatial organization of the mass grave in Tylawa stands for Christian memory culture. The two, initially mentioned, road signs showing the way



Fig. 6. Road sign to the mass grave in Tylawa, July 2022, M. Saryusz-Wolska.

35 Interview with H.

to the grave strengthen this conclusion, as they depict the icon of a Christian grave (Fig. 6). This notwithstanding, I would not conclude on this basis that the monument in Tylawa is an example of Christianizing the Holocaust.<sup>36</sup> The people who do the memory work there are mostly Christian (but not necessarily Catholic) Poles and they commemorate the murdered Jews by means of rituals which are familiar to them. The road signs are in accordance with the Polish traffic act and represent the Polish state symbolic rather than a specific religious iconography. The structures visible in Tylawa prove, therefore, what we can see elsewhere in Poland, namely that Christian symbols largely dominate the once multi-religious country.

### Infrastructures of Mass Shooting

I cannot properly read the current monument in Tylawa without detailed knowledge about the events from 1942. The logic of infrastructural inversion requires investigation of the technological and material settings of individual actions that contributed to the mass shooting. Was this particular place more suitable for a mass murder than others? How did the victims get there? Who dug the pit (and how)? Was it just one pit, as the form of the monument suggests today, or were there more of them? Was it/were they very deep? And if so, was it/were they reinforced to avoid sinking? How much ammunition did the perpetrators need? Who covered the bodies (and how)? How did the summer temperature affect the decomposition of the dead bodies? Who covered up the pit after the shooting (and how)? Additional questions arose in the course of the archival work, as documents from the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes in Poland suggest that there was more than just one mass shooting in Tylawa.<sup>37</sup> If so, are the bodies buried in the same grave? Thinking in terms of infrastructures therefore means that instead of focusing on issues typical of Holocaust studies, such as relations between victims and bystanders/helpers and perpetrators, we should also consider

36 For the concept of Christianizing the Holocaust see publications by Elżbieta Janicka, "Pamięć nieprzywojona?" [Unabsorbed memory], *Kultura Współczesna* 63 (1) (2010); "'Corpus Christi, corpus delicti' – nowy kontrakt narracyjny. Pokłosie (2012) Władysława Pasikowskiego wobec kompromitacji kategorii polskiego świadka Zagłady," *Studia Litteraria Historica* 7 (2018).

37 Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce [Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes in Poland], *Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni popełnionych przez okupanta hitlerowskiego na ziemiach polskich w latach 1939–1945. Województwo krośnieńskie* [Register of sites and facts of Nazi crimes in Poland from 1939 to 1945. The Krosno voivodeship] (Warszawa, 1983), 145.

roads and means of transportation, weapons (not necessarily guns) and ammunition, pits and tools for digging them, soil and plants, season and temperature, and so on. A good example for the entanglement of infrastructures which are necessary to commit a mass murder is a letter from the mayor of Dukla to the Jewish Community (meaning probably the “Judenrat”) from July 30, 1942. The mayor ordered the Jews to prepare six beds “in very good condition” with bed linen, six chairs, two wardrobes, and two basins for six German military policemen” that were about to come.<sup>38</sup> Apparently, the victims had to prepare the housing equipment for their murderers. Obviously, the issue of infrastructures does not replace other topics of Holocaust research. Just as in Domańska’s model of “environmental history of mass graves,” my idea of infrastructural history is conceptualized as complementary to the methods which we already have.<sup>39</sup>

The issue of choosing the place for the shooting is related to a more general one, namely transportation. Although much research has been done on this topic, it has usually focused on the railway infrastructure.<sup>40</sup> An important question still remains open, though: why did Germans in Dukla and other towns of the Krakow and Galicia District murder only some Jews in death camps and shoot others on the spot? When I asked other scholars about this, they usually pointed to the poor transportation infrastructure in the region. However, a comparison of the railway maps in the Krakow District of the General Government, which prior to 1918 had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with the railway maps of the Radom or Lublin District, which until 1918 had been part of the Russian Empire, proves that the railway infrastructure in the Krakow District was relatively well developed. And yet most of the Jews from the northern districts of the General Government were deported to the death camps, whereas in the southern districts (Krakow and Galicia District), mass shootings were much more common.

Consequently, I do not know why a few hundred Jews were taken from Dukla to the train station in Iwonicz (today: Targowiska) and from there to Bełżec, while others were taken to Tylawa. But a reading of historical maps from the time helps us to understand why the Jews from Dukla and Rymanów were shot in Tylawa, and not elsewhere. On the one hand, the killing site is

38 Letter from the Mayor of Dukla to the Jewish Community, July 30, 1942, courtesy of Jacek Koszczań.

39 Ewa Domańska, “The Environmental History of Mass Graves,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2) (2020): 245.

40 See the classic work by Raul Hilberg, *Sonderzüge nach Auschwitz* (Berlin: Ulstein, 1987). For more recent approaches see Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes*, 99–123; Libionka, *Zagłada Żydów*, 104–105.

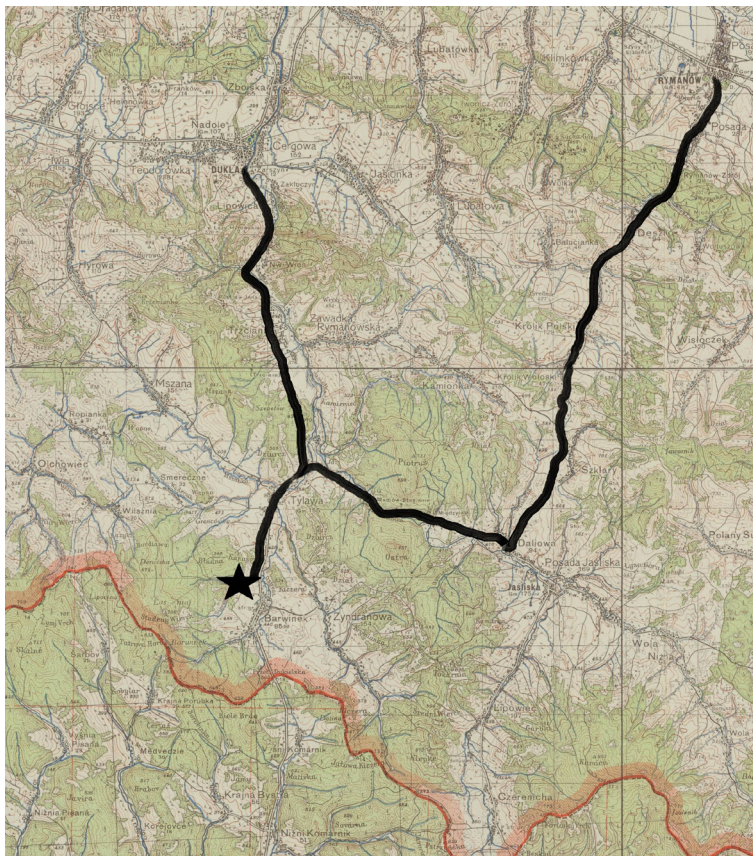


Fig. 7. Topographical map, 1942. The star marks the killing site, marked in black are the roads from Dukla (left) and Rymanów (right).

not far away from the place where the roads from Dukla and Rymanów cross (Fig. 7). The logistics of Operation Reinhardt required putting different “liquidations” together. On the other hand, the place of the execution was not yet a forest (as it is today) but a marshy meadow where digging large pits was quite easy. The Holocaust archaeologist Caroline Sturdy Colls speaks in this context about “opportunistic burial sites,” that is natural conditions which facilitated burying the many victims of mass shootings.<sup>41</sup> Colls means

<sup>41</sup> Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeology. Approaches and Future Directions* (Cham: Springer, 2015), 282.



primary ravine or natural holes, but the structure of the soil is also certainly an “opportunistic” factor.

Also speculative (at this stage of research) is the answer to the question about the exact relationship between the actual killing site and the location of the mass grave, or, as archaeologists put it, between the “fields of death” (*pola śmierci*) and “fields of pits” (*pola dołów*).<sup>42</sup> As mentioned above, the monument’s shape suggests that it covers the mass grave – it is a rectangle of 25 x 5 meters. Witnesses of the mass shooting commented on the pit’s size: while one of them said that it had been “very long” and about 4 m wide, another claimed that it had been no wider than 2 meters. Similar discrepancies concern the depth of the pit: the first witness said that it was at least 3 meters deep; the second responded that from their point of view it was impossible to estimate the pit’s depth.<sup>43</sup> At one point of the interview, the first witness also said that the execution had taken place “not far from the place where they [the Jews] are buried now.” Then, however, he visited the grave with the interviewers and gesticulated as if the monument was the actual shooting site.<sup>44</sup>

Does the materiality of the current monument contribute to clearing up these confusions? Depending on the shooting technique, in a 25 x 5 meter pit 50 to 100 bodies fit in one layer. Theoretically, it is possible that the mass grave in Tylawa, as marked by the monument, covers five to ten layers of bodies. Practically, it is very unlikely that the bodies were laid down so precisely. Witnesses were consistent in their claims that the Jews had been forced to step on a wooden board and from there had fallen into the pit. It is also unlikely that the pit was very deep, because it would have collapsed while digging in the marshy soil. In 1990, Richard Wright excavated a Jewish mass grave in Serniki (Ukraine) with approximately 500 bodies – hence a similar case to that of Tylawa. Its surface, though, was almost twice as large as the monument in Tylawa and of a much less regular shape.<sup>45</sup> In

---

42 Adam Falis, “Wspólny grób ofiar różnych totalitaryzmów. Ekshumacje na terenie dawnego więzienia w Białymstoku w latach 2013–2014,” in *Poszukiwanie i identyfikacja ofiar zbrodni systemów totalitarnych*, ed. Marcin Zwolski (Białystok: IPN, 2018). Quoted after Ewa Domańska, “Nekrozdzieictwo” [Necroheritage], in *Ekshumacje polityczne. Teoria i praktyka* [Political exhumations. Theory and practice], ed. Alexandra Staniewska and Ewa Domańska (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz/Terytoria, 2023), 594.

43 Yahad-In Unum, Witnesses No. 357 PO and 358 PO. Interviews from June 22, 2014, courtesy of Yahad-In Unum.

44 Yahad-In Unum, Witness No 358 PO.

45 Richard Wright, Ian Hanson and Jon Sternberg, “The Archaeology of Mass Graves,” in *Forensic Archaeology: Advances in Theory and Practice*, ed. John Hunter and Margaret Cox (London–New York: Routledge 2005); see also Sydney Jewish Museum, *Unearthing*

addition, no sources mention the Germans burning the corpses in Tylawa (which would explain the relatively small size of the monument), as was the case in some other places in occupied Poland.<sup>46</sup> In Tylawa, they remained untouched, at least until the end of the war.

Thinking of mass shootings as concrete actions in specific material settings inevitably leads us to macabre descriptions and calculations, such as the one above. On their basis, I assumed that the actual “field of the pit” was probably larger than the surface of the monument and the “field of death”

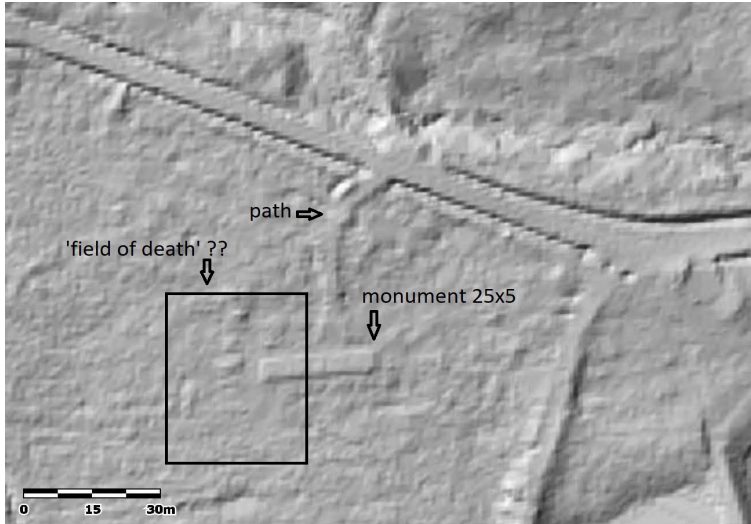


Fig. 8 LiDAR image of the killing site in Tylawa. I am grateful to Anna Zalewska and Jacek Czarnecki for their help in the analysis of the LiDAR images.

must have been even much larger. On the LiDAR images, we can see shapes of presumably anthropogenic origins that reach beyond the very well visible monument (Fig. 8). Also, an aerial photograph from 1944 shows a clearing at the edge of the forest with irregularities and a slightly brighter surface (Fig. 9). This can be explained by the fact that the killing-site was covered with lime, as the witnesses claimed.<sup>47</sup> The analysis therefore leads to the preliminary

*the Holocaust*, accessed May 4, 2023, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/owVRI-4OEK1Sfog>.

46 Andrej Angrick, *“Aktion 1005” – Spuren beseitigung von NS-Massenverbrechen 1942–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018), Chapter 5.2.

47 Yahad-In Unum, Witnesses No. 357 PO and 358 PO.

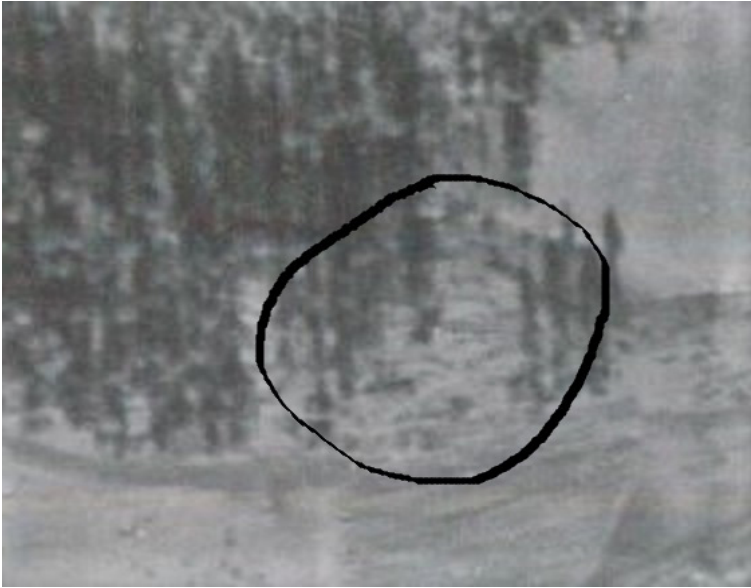


Fig. 9. Aerial photograph, 1944. The area around the current monument is marked in black.

conclusion that the monument, which indeed has the shape of a mass grave, is in fact smaller than the “field of the pit” and the “field of death.” I made similar, and even clearer, findings of this kind elsewhere – for example in Jasienica Rosielna and Brzozów, where the different sizes of the monuments and the pits are visible at first sight.

Specialists in conflict archaeology advise triangulating research results from various methods, especially when excavations are not allowed. The two most commonly used methods are GPR (ground penetrating radar) and forensic chemistry, aimed at determining the level of phosphorus (an element released during the decomposition of human and animal remains) in the soil.<sup>48</sup> Yet GPR is not very helpful in forests, such as the one in Tylawa,

48 GPR is among the techniques used by the Zapomniane Foundation, which traces non-commemorated graves of Holocaust victims in Poland. For more information see Lawrence B. Conyers, *Interpreting Ground Penetrating Radar for Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2012). For information about phosphorus in the context of mass graves, see Józef Żychowski, “Selected Elements in the Soils Covering Mass Graves from World Wars I and II in Southeastern Poland,” *Minerals* 11(3) (2021). Żychowski’s analyses also cover the mass grave in Tylawa. See Józef Żychowski, *Wpływ masowych grobów z I i II wojny światowej na środowisko przyrodnicze* [The influence of mass graves from World Wars I and II on their natural environment] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe AP, 2008).

where tree roots disturb the image. Determining the level of phosphorus, in turn, requires taking soil samples, which is controversial in the light of the Halakha. There are, however, other underestimated elements of the necro-escape that may help, namely trees. In her famous poem about trees witnessing the Holocaust, Halina Birenbaum writes “The trees are silent / The trees have seen and heard a lot / Have imbibed and covered much / But even when rustling / They remain silent.”<sup>49</sup> Fortunately, dendrologists are able to elicit useful information from trees, despite their literal silence. The idea is based on the assumption that chemicals from the ground accommodate in plants. The taking of tree samples has not started yet, so I cannot offer any results. Hopefully, the dendrologists whom I work with will be able to determine the level of phosphorus and calcium (constituent of lime) in the tree trunks, which would solve the problem of taking soil samples. The method sounds promising, especially in the light of some testimonies that the Germans forced Poles to plant seedlings on the mass graves in order to cover them.<sup>50</sup>

### Conclusion

Among the matters which occupy me most in Tylawa is the spatial relationship between the memorial site and the killing site. While I applied infrastructural inversion to the memory and history of the mass shooting in Tylawa, which practically meant disassembling all processes into singular actions and routine procedures within their material settings, I realized that I overlooked one step that split history from memory. In 1946, Adolf Nattel, a survivor from Dukla, testified what he knew from hearsay (he was not in Dukla at that time), namely that in Tylawa the Germans shot around 400 people on August 13, 1942.<sup>51</sup> Later testimonies mentioned about 500 victims. How did they know, and why were they so consistent? I went through the scarce documentation again and suddenly realized: the bodies may have been exhumed! In a handwritten table from 1948, we read that there are two mass graves with 522 bodies in total “for exhumation.”<sup>52</sup> Another, undated table states

49 English translation quoted from Agnieszka Kłos, “The Green Matzevah,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 22 (2) (2020): 230.

50 Krzysztof Malicki, *Poza wspólnotą pamięci. Życie i Zagłada Żydów w pamięci regionu podkarpackiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS, 2017), 205, 207.

51 Testimony of A. Nattel, AŻIH 301/1757.

52 Wykaz ofiar terroru pochowanych na terenie woj. rzeszowskiego (powiat Krosno) [List of victims of terror buried in the Rzeszów voivodeship (Krosno district)], AP Sanok, 60/1193/0/95, k. 20.

that 503 bodies were “exhumed to Dukla in 1952”<sup>53</sup> – a fact which I believe was only on paper. On the one hand, no other source mentioned such a large post-war entombment in Dukla; on the other hand, transporting 500 bodies would have been a large, cost- and time-intensive operation. Given that the bodies were already buried in the provisional mass grave in Tylawa, bringing them to Dukla was not necessary. In any case, however, local authorities carried out excavations in Tylawa in the early post-war years. In all likelihood, they took the bodies from the primary deposition place and entombed them accurately again. Having other resources (probably more time or shoveling machines), the people in charge of the post-war exhumations may have laid down the bodies in a deep grave measuring 25 x 5 meters which the monument later covered. Whether the spatial shift took place or not is still to be verified. If true, this hypothesis would explain at least some of the confusion mentioned above. There is no doubt, however, that exhumations and secondary entombments in close vicinity to the initial pits took place in other killing sites. While the mass shootings are usually commemorated (more or less visible), the exhumations are absent from the mnemonic space. Although commemorative forms, like the monument in Tylawa, suggest being located exactly at the crime scene, history and memory are often spatially separated.

The issue of exhumations in post-war Poland is not new, though it is still to be sufficiently discussed by researchers.<sup>54</sup> In her monograph about the Polish post-war memory of World War II, Joanna Wawrzyniak argues that Poles “dug up corpses and arranged their funerals,” while the Polish state was consolidating its powers in the early post-war years.<sup>55</sup> A very recent discovery, which I made in the archives, namely an internal report from the Council for the Preservation of Monuments of Fights and Martyrdom (Rada Ochrony Pomników Walk i Męczeństwa, ROPWiM), confirmed the importance of mass graves for the understanding of Polish post-war traumas. The report states that between 1947 and 1960 alone, approximately 2.5 million human bodies were exhumed to mass graves in Poland.<sup>56</sup> Schools and the scouting organiza-

---

53 Wykaz ofiar terroru z powiatu Krosno [List of victims of terror from the Krosno district], AP Sanok 60/1193/0/1582, k. 64.

54 Domańska, *Nekros*, and – most recently – *Ekshumacje polityczne*, ed. Staniewska and Domańska.

55 Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory. The Politics of the Second World War in Communist Poland* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2015), 60.

56 *Wybrane problemy działalności Rady Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa PRL w trzydziestolecium 1947–1977* [Selected aspects of the activity of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites], AAN 2/2253/0/4.3.1/317, k. 5. However, the number is

tion (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, ZHP) largely supported these actions. Apparently, dead bodies affected not only the war generation, but the post-war cohorts too.<sup>57</sup>

## Abstract

---

**Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska**

UNIVERSITY OF LODZ, GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE, WARSAW

*Infrastructures of Holocaust Mass Graves: Work-in-Progress in Tylawa*

In the course of Operation Reinhardt, Germans not only deported Jews to death camps but also killed them in mass shootings in the close vicinity of their homes. The mass graves are still part of the Polish landscape. Meanwhile, most of these post-killing sites are marked in space and commemorated. Taking the example of the mass grave in Tylawa, in southeastern Poland, the article gives an insight into research on the memory of the mass shootings. Given the poor archival documentation, the author argues that physical matter, including landscape, is very informative as a source on the history and memory of Operation Reinhardt. A method used for interpreting physical objects and their entanglement with human actions is called infrastructural inversion, as proposed by Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star. The author therefore applies the concept of infrastructure in order to understand the historical and mnemonic processes behind the mass grave and its monument in Tylawa.

## Keywords

---

mass graves, Holocaust by bullets, infrastructure studies, Holocaust memory, southeastern Poland

---

underestimated, as ROPWiM did not consider German soldiers because already from the early post-war years the (West) German *Volksbund* [War Graves Commission] has been in charge of exhuming the German corpses.

57 Katarzyna Grzybowska, "The "Alert" for Non-sites of Memory: A 1965 Scout Action of Discovering and Describing Second World War Sites in Poland," *Heritage, Memory and Conflict* 1 (2021): 63–72.