

Classification and Significance of Material Culture from Archaeological Research of Section Blb of the Former KL Auschwitz II – Birkenau

Paweł Lewicki, Magdalena Mazurkiewicz

PL ISSN 0066-5924; e-ISSN: 2719-6542

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23858/APa61.2023.3542>

<https://rcin.org.pl/dlibra/publication/276580>

Jak cytować

Lewicki, P., & Mazurkiewicz, M. (2023). Classification and Significance of Material Culture from Archaeological Research of Section Blb of the Former KL Auschwitz II - Birkenau. *Archaeologia Polona*, 61, 201–218. <https://doi.org/10.23858/APa61.2023.3542>

Classification and Significance of Material Culture from Archaeological Research of Section BIb of the Former KL Auschwitz II - Birkenau

Paweł Lewicki^a and Magdalena Mazurkiewicz^b

This article discusses the analysis of material discovered during archaeological excavations conducted in the areas of former concentration camps, based on the results of work carried out on the site of the former German concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz II-Birkenau. The specificity of the sites from the 20th century forces the development of new research methods and procedures, slightly different from those traditionally used in archaeology. One of the significant problems is the mass nature of the discovered artefacts. These items were substantially made of decay-resistant materials such as plastic, glass or metal alloys. In addition to the amount of acquired items, difficulties are also caused due to the way they are classified and processed. The classifications used in traditional archaeology, focusing primarily on the type of raw material used to produce the artefact, have proven to be unsuitable.

Keywords: Auschwitz II-Birkenau, concentration camp, material culture, contemporary archaeology

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

Archaeological research of places related to the activities of totalitarian states of the 20th century is a relatively young and constantly developing branch of modern archaeology. A significant increase in research interest in the subject of contemporary archaeology, and in particular in the conflicts that took place in the 20th century, has been clearly visible for the last 30 years or so. The ratification of the European Convention

^a Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 20 Więźniów Oświęcimia Street, 32-600 Oświęcim; e-mail: pawel.lewicki@auschwitz.org; ORCID: 0009-0005-0413-3593

^b Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 20 Więźniów Oświęcimia Street, 32-600 Oświęcim; e-mail: magdalena.mazurkiewicz@auschwitz.org; ORCID: 0009-0001-4119-787X

on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (also called the Malta Convention) has significantly contributed to this. It waived previous chronological limitations in relation to the traces of human activity researched by archaeologists (Theune 2018, 14–16). The large increase in research at the sites of former extermination, concentration and internment camps is also related to the social desire to commemorate these places by building monuments, museum facilities and marking their locations and their remains in the field. Several such initiatives have been undertaken in many European countries, mainly in Poland, Germany and Austria, but also in the USA and Canada. In accordance with Polish legislation, archaeological research is obligatory if excavation work is performed in the areas entered in the register of monuments. In the course of their execution, the relics of historical buildings and infrastructure hidden underground, as well as significant amounts of movable items related to the functioning of the camps, are secured. Contemporary archaeology, using the methods of field research and material analysis that have been developed in science so far, faces the need to adapt them to the specificity of these sites. One of the major challenges is the processing of the acquired historic material. This usually begins with the creation of a chronological and typological classification combined with a description of the production technique, shape and function of the obtained objects (Theune 2018, 33). Correctly conducted classification is extremely important, because errors at this stage may lead to issues in the interpretation phase (cf., Minta-Tworzowska 2012).

CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AT THE GERMAN NAZI CONCENTRATION AND EXTERMINATION CAMP AUSCHWITZ II-BIRKENAU

Birkenau camp consisted of three main parts, corresponding to the construction sections Bauabschnitt I, II and III (the planned Section IV was never completed). Bauabschnitt I (BI), which was additionally divided into the eastern (BIa) and western (BIb) parts, was located at the southern end of the complex. Further north, Sections BII and BIII were built (Strzelecka 1995, 63–80; Bartosik *et al.*, 2017, 15–26). Current archaeological work accompanying excavations are mainly conducted as part of the comprehensive conservation tasks performed by the Master Plan for Preservation.¹ Most of this work is concentrated in Section BI.

¹ The Master Plan for Preservation is a comprehensive and long-term programme of conservation works developed and implemented by the Museum, aimed at preserving the relics of the German Nazi concentration and extermination camp. The implementation of the plan takes place through the deployment of conservation projects covering specific objects or comprehensively

Currently, its largest part is related to comprehensive conservation of the brick barracks in Section BIb.

Section BIb is the oldest part of the Birkenau camp. Works on its construction had been started by the Germans in October 1941. In March 1942 a men's camp, which became a branch of KL Auschwitz, was established there. In July 1943, the men were moved to another part of the camp, and Section BIb was attached to the women's camp (so far located only in Section BIa). On January 27, 1945, the camp was liberated by the Red Army – the soldiers of the 60th Army of the First Ukrainian Front (Czech 1992; Strzelecka 1995, 68–71). Between January 1945 and March 1946, Soviet NKVD²-administered camp No. 78 operated on the site of the former Birkenau camp. Prisoners of war and civilians were kept there. Most of the inmates were later taken for forced labour deep into the territory of the USSR (Dębiński 2014, 68–69).

Archaeological research performed in Section BIb is closely related to conservation and renovation works, the objective of which was to secure and strengthen the structure of the brick residential barracks. The scope of the research is subordinate to the execution of excavation works for the purposes of drainage and stabilisation of the barracks' foundations. The area of work is limited to the necessary minimum. This is due to the awareness that excavation is an invasive method. In addition, movable material obtained during the research requires processing and conservation, which in the case of 20th-century sites may mean the need to analyse and secure a vast number of items. The above-mentioned issues have already been discussed in the literature on the subject (see Sturdy Colls 2015; Müller 2017; Bernbeck 2018, 365). The most significant ones include the results of archaeological research conducted in connection with the renovation and conservation of Barracks no. 7 and 8 (Foks *et al.*, 2020). Material obtained during the work on Barracks 26 and 27 are still being processed. The problems encountered and the experience gained during the analysis of numerous complexes of objects collected during the aforementioned research are the starting point for this article.

PROPOSALS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF MASS ARTEFACTS FROM WORLD WAR II CONCENTRATION CAMPS

In particular, it should be emphasised that a large number of items was found, which is no surprise given the history of the site under research. Due to the development

treated conservation problems. The Global Conservation Plan is financed by funds provided by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.

2 NKVD – The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (in Russian: Нарóдный комиссари́ат вnúтренних дел [*Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*]).

of civilisation in the 20th century, the number of belongings produced and owned by people have drastically increased (Theune 2015, 37). This phenomenon has intensified in connection with the increasingly common use of synthetic raw materials, more resistant to post-deposition processes, as well as the introduction of large-scale mass production in the 19th and 20th centuries (Duma 2016, 242–244). As a result, during archaeological research at sites from the period of World War II, a large set of objects is usually obtained, the vast majority of which do not have individual characteristics. This has also been the case in relation to the items from the research in the area described.

In the years 2015–2020, as a result of archaeological research conducted in the area of Barracks 7 and 8 in Section BIb of the former KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau, 6751 artefacts were collected from excavations having a total area of 1086 m². The almost-completed research at Barrack 26 has provided 5712 finds from excavations of 335.5 m² area. Discovering such a large number of movable objects was possible thanks to the research methodology applied, based on careful exploration, combined with sifting of anthropogenic layers and searching the surface of the excavations using a metal detector. Most of the items obtained are objects characterised by a high repetition of forms resulting from serial production. Their state of preservation varies. A great many of them are everyday objects – elements of clothing, dishes, cutlery or small tools. The most numerous group of finds are objects related to the camp infrastructure and facilities – fragments of window glass, nails and other metal construction elements (hooks, anchors, construction clamps). The large number of objects made it necessary to develop a specific method of ordering and classifying the materials obtained.

The main problem was to choose the method of analysis. Traditional division of artefacts in terms of raw material, used in archaeology, seems to be completely useless in the case of researching the material culture of the 20th century, which includes excavated objects. Items made of one raw material, e.g., glass, can have various functions, such as windowpanes, dishes for various purposes, parts of clothing or other items, such as pairs of glasses, torches or mirrors. Similarly, one type of item, e.g., a clothing button, can be made of many types of raw materials, such as metal, plastic, mother-of-pearl, bone or wood, so they cannot be assigned to one material group. This has already been pointed out in the literature on the subject, emphasising that in modern times the relation between the function and the material of which the item was made has been lost (cf., Schute 2013a, 39; Schute 2013b, 10). It seems much more appropriate to divide the material into functional categories when analysing artefacts from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Such a system was used for the development of material obtained during the archaeological research of the internment camp in Manzanar, California which

operated during World War II. Japanese and Americans of Japanese origin were held there (Burton 1996). The classification division adopted at this site was a continuation of the scheme developed for the analysis of materials from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries from archaeological excavations in Skagway, Alaska (Blee 1988). The excavated items were divided into five main categories: 1 – structural artefacts, 2 – domestic artefacts, 3 – personal artefacts, 4 – artefacts associated with other activities and 5 – unclassified artefacts. Each of the main groups was divided into smaller subclasses (Blee 1988, 28–35; Burton 1996, 194–195). Thanks to this system, the review of the historic material from individual excavations was structured, and it was also easier to compare the obtained groups of items. In addition, annexes containing more detailed analyses of glass, metal and ceramic artefacts, and clothing buttons separately, were added to the treatment of the results of the Manzanar research (Burton 1996).

In European archaeology, too, there have been attempts to analyse historical material obtained as a result of archaeological work in former concentration, extermination or internment camps. Ronald Hirte (2000) was the first to raise the issue of a detailed study of artefacts from such sites. He discussed the results of a large pile of items lying in the area of the former, so-called small KL Buchenwald camp in Thuringia. From a relatively small area of 4 x 4 m, a total of 6407 items were obtained, of which as many as 3843 were buttons. Then, the finds were classified in terms of functionality into 17 groups (1 – camp, 2 – international, 3 – location, 4 – work, 5 – health, 6 – hygiene, 7 – food, 8 – jewellery, 9 – religion, 10 – leisure, 11 – prisoners functionaries, 12 – women, 13 – children, 14 – numbers, 15 – name, 16 – transport and 17 – death). Artefacts could be assigned to more than one category at the same time (Hirte 2000, 31–54).

The results of archaeological research conducted on the site of the former KL Sachsenhausen in Brandenburg were also of great importance in the development of research on the material culture of concentration camps. In 2006, during geophysical research, a large waste pit with dimensions of 30 x 5.6 m and a depth of 2 to 3 m was found. During its exploration, 5556.3 kg of finds were collected, including about 3000 kg of iron, 800 kg of glass and 300 kg of porcelain items (Theune 2010, 5–7). Comprehensive classification of this material proved to be extremely difficult. Finally, it was decided to select about 1600 items, the study of which became the basis for writing a master's thesis (Theune 2010, 7; Kersting and Müller 2015, 171–172). The collection of artefacts was divided according to the functional criterion. There were seven main groups: 1 – construction, 2 – clothing, 3 – toiletries, 4 – household, 5 – militaria, 6 – coins, 7 – other, which were then split into smaller subgroups.

The artefact classification system adopted during the research in Sachsenhausen became the basis for the analysis of the material collected during the work conducted on the site of the former transit camp in Westerbork, the Netherlands (*Judendurchgangslager* Westerbork). At the turn of 2011 and 2012, archaeological research was conducted on a landfill located to the north of the camp. Thanks to topographical and geophysical research and drilling, the size of the landfill was estimated at approximately 3200 m² and its capacity at approximately 900 m³. This site was identified through excavations, establishing 3 trenches, from which a total of 19,525 items with a total weight of 466 kg were obtained. Based on the acquired results, it was estimated that there may be about 5.8 million items in the landfill (Schute 2013a; 2013b 8–11). The finds were assigned to 14 functional groups (1 – methods of payment, 2 – construction, 3 – consumption, 4 – electronics, 5 – identity, 6 – interior and garden, 7 – office supplies, 8 – clothing, 9 – medicines, 10 – military, 11 – hygiene, 12 – transport, 13 – leisure, 14 – other), also divided into smaller subcategories. The publication summarising the research results does not only discuss the division itself, but also includes a table with a description of characteristic items (Schute 2013a, 38–61).

A slightly different view on the classification division of artefacts obtained as a result of work conducted on the area of the former German Nazi concentration camps was presented by Gilly Carr (2018). Her concept assumes the division of items into six categories: 1 – objects of identity, 2 – objects of the body, 3 – objects of daily life and survival, 4 – objects of repression, 5 – violence, and power, 6 – objects of the world of the camp, unidentified or fragmentary objects. Groups 1–3 are additionally divided into subcategories: a – prisoners and b – guards, while group 4 is assigned only to overseers and guards. The presented classification tries to put the individual prisoners and their bodies in the centre, gradually moving to the camp world that surrounds them. As the author of the concept herself notes, the proposed categories overlap and are not completely unambiguous (Carr 2018, 539–541).

In Polish archaeological literature, the subject of classification and analysis of artefacts from the research on concentration, extermination and internment camps has remained on the margins of interest. Usually, the focus was on the exposed remains of architecture and the planning of the camp layout. Despite very advanced excavation works in some cases, the authors of the reports often limited themselves to a brief mention of the number of finds, combined with the presentation of selected, more characteristic items in the case of the obtained artefacts. There have been several publications presenting objects excavated during archaeological work carried out in the former extermination and concentration camps in Chełmno on the Ner river (Kulmhof am Ner), Koło distr. (Grzegorzcyk 2014), Sobibor, Włodawa distr. (Kranz

et al., 2018), in Kraków-Płaszów (KL Plaszow; Karski 2019). Although they have great educational value, they are more album-like and less analytical in nature.

Attempts to analyse the historic material more thoroughly were made in the case of research work in Sobibor. The authors of these undertakings paid attention to the need to analyse the artefacts in order to fully understand the discovered structures. They also emphasised the information potential contained therein, as well as its role in education about the Holocaust (Gilead *et al.*, 30–36). In subsequent seasons, a Dutch archaeologist, Ivar Schute, and others were invited to the research. He helped with the reviewing of items brought to the camp in transports of Dutch Jews, (Schute 2013b; cf., also Schute 2018). Unfortunately, no collective summary of the results of many years of archaeological work conducted in Sobibor has been published so far.

Kamil Karski has recently provided a bit more information on archaeological artefacts obtained during the research of the KL Plaszow concentration camp. The collection of artefacts was divided into 3 main categories: 1 – prisoners' personal belongings, 2 – objects associated with oppressors, 3 – constructional elements of the camp infrastructure. In addition, smaller subcategories were separated including, e.g., items related to life in the ghetto, Judaica, valuables, items related to food, work tools. Separate attention was paid to the so-called mass artefacts, dividing them both into raw material categories, e.g., glass and specific types of items, e.g., soles, ceramic tiles, electrical installation elements (Karski 2020, 59–63).

ANALYSIS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS OF KL AUSCHWITZ II-BIRKENAU

The analysis of the historical material obtained during the work carried out in Section BIb of the former KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau was based on the functional classification of objects. This was caused by the already mentioned lack of a close relationship between the function of the item and the raw material from which it was made. The creation of this classification was mostly influenced by the concept used in the description of the Manzanar materials (Burton 1996, 194–195). This was, however, slightly changed and adapted to the nature of the objects discovered in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Efforts were made to separate as few functional main groups as possible, dividing them into more detailed subcategories, corresponding to specific types of artefacts. Unfortunately, functional classification in the context of materials from concentration camps is highly complicated and carries a high risk of interpretation error. In extreme living conditions, prisoners were often forced to

modify or improvise the items they needed (Myers 2007, 62; Levi 2008, 37). What is more, items were often used in many different ways. Their purpose could have been changed as a result of practices related to the specific requirements of living conditions and the environment, which usually remain intangible to archaeologists (Hausmair *et al.*, 2021, 409–410).

Despite the awareness of the described limitations, in order to organise the collected material and to enable deeper analyses, it was decided to divide it according to functional criteria. The artefacts were grouped into six main categories: 1 – personal items, 2 – food and health, 3 – elements of the camp's buildings and infrastructure, 4 – activities and free time, 5 – military items and 6 – other. Each of the main groups is additionally divided into subcategories.

Group 1 includes items that were in the prisoners' direct possession. Some were given to them by the camp administration – e.g., clothes. Others, such as jewellery, usually came from smuggling or illegal trade inside the camp. Group 2 includes items related to food and health. Group 3 consists of all items related to structural and building elements, as well as tools used in the construction and extension of the camp. The most diverse group, no. 4, contains items related to various, mostly illegal activities of the prisoners. It also includes examples of camp art. Military items, constituting group 5, were classified separately. This includes all items produced for the needs of the armies of various countries. The last, 6th group was left for unidentified items (usually due to their poor state of preservation), as well as individual items that did not fit into previous groups.

As in the case of other functional categorisations, problems occur with some items that can be assigned to several groups at the same time. The dilemmas concern, for example, the following situations. Should jewellery made illegally by a prisoner be included in group 1 or 4? Should a knife made of a sheet of metal or a piece of flat metal bar (group 4) be assigned to the subgroup of handicrafts, or rather to small tools? Eventually, the superiority of illegal manufacturing activities of prisoners was assumed, and these were assigned to categories related to handicrafts. Such dilemmas are a significant limitation of classification based on the function of items. This problem can be solved by linking the described products into association groups related to a specific sphere of camp life (cf., Hausmair *et al.*, 2021, 410–414).

It was decided not to divide the items into those belonging to the prisoners and those left by the guards. Attempts to make such a distinction can lead to very ambiguous conclusions. While some artefacts, such as clogs or badges with prisoners' markings and numbers (Fig. 1:1), can almost certainly be attributed to a group of prisoners, a number of other items, such as small elements of uniforms, do not provide grounds for identifying their user. From the memoirs of the survivors, it is known



Fig. 1. Selected finds from the excavations in former KL Auschwitz – II Birkenau: 1 – prisoners badge, 2 – French post uniform button, 3 – miniature cup, 4 – coin, 5 – ring. Photo: P. Lewicki.

that some groups of prisoners were dressed in uniforms. For instance, Wiesław Kielar describes a group of Jewish women dressed in uniforms of murdered Soviet prisoners of war (Kielar 1976, 170). This is confirmed by the finds of uniform buttons of various armies and services from different parts of occupied Europe (Fig. 1:2). In this regard, the finds made during the archaeological research of the camp for German prisoners of war in Riding Mountain in Canada also seem to be significant. The buckle discovered there was identified as coming from Wehrmacht uniform trousers, however, during a literature search, it turned out that an identical buckle was located, among others, on a striped prisoner's uniform from KL Buchenwald (Myers 2013, 199, fig. 9.5). Thus, any conclusions and judgments regarding the use and the user of a given item should be made with appropriate caution.

The classified material makes it possible to perform a deeper analysis and compare the results of research conducted in various parts of Section BIb of the former KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau. The above analyses enable the nature and use of some of the barracks to be determined. A good example may be the spatial analysis of artefacts classified as medicines (2nd functional group). The results of research conducted in the area of Barracks 7 and 8 and at Barracks 26 and 27 were used for comparison. During the operation of the camp, in Section BIb of the men's camp, Barracks 7 and 8 housed a hospital (Foks 2018, 19–23). This is also confirmed by the results of archaeological research, during which 58 artefacts from the group of medicines were obtained. For comparison, research conducted at Barracks 26 and 27 brought only 28 finds of this type. This discrepancy would be even greater if we were to remove the glass ampoules from the analysed collection (Fig. 2:3). The vast majority of these correspond in terms of shape to the ampoules that were in the first-aid kits of German soldiers. A storage tin (Fig. 2:2) was found during cleaning works in one of the barracks in Section BIb. Being aware of the large number of prisoners of war staying in the NKVD camp in KL Birkenau, the vast majority of finds of ampoules can be associated with the post-war phase. It is worth emphasising another problem of conducting research in the areas of concentration and extermination camps here. In many places, the discovery of objects is made almost on the surface or between the construction elements of barracks and bunks. Interpretation of such finds is additionally difficult and requires caution.

Attention should also be drawn to the nature and individual characteristics of the items found and what they contribute to our knowledge of the camp. Part of the collected material has trademarks or manufacturer's brands that make it possible to determine where it was manufactured. Some, such as coins, can be associated with the individual countries from which transports of deported people were sent to the camp. Others allow for a more precise determination of their origin. Examples



Fig. 2. Selected finds from the excavations in former KL Auschwitz – II Birkenau: 1 – knife, 2 – tin, 3 – ampoules, 4 – spoon. Photo: P. Lewicki.

include a souvenir cup from the Bad Reichenhall spa in Bavaria (Fig. 1:3) or a beer bottle from the Trieste brewery (Fig. 3:1). Analysis of all the material obtained provides an insight into the genocidal activities of the Third Reich in Europe. Items related to the ghetto in Łódź are an interesting group among the objects of specific origin. Along with the transports to KL Birkenau camp, such items as characteristic jewellery with motifs of life in the ghetto (Fig. 1:5) and coins constituting the official currency of the ghetto (Fig. 1:4) were brought.

Objects found during the research in Section BI are evidence of the living conditions in the camp. The shortage of basic items needed for life made it necessary to make tools. The basis of the prisoners' diet, apart from bread, was soup, and to eat it a dish and a spoon were needed. The extremely high status of these items in the camp is confirmed by the memories of prisoners (Levi 2008, 98). Their production within the camp is confirmed by archaeological finds (Fig. 2:4). In addition to spoons, other everyday items were also produced, such as clothes hangers (Fig. 3:2–3) or knives (Fig. 2:1). An interesting material witnesses of adapting to the constraints of camp life is a lamp made of a mackerel tin with a wick made of a piece of cloth put inside (Fig. 3:4). All these finds could be interpreted also as examples of prisoner's survival strategies (see Theune 2018, 127–130).

In addition to the production of utility items, a number of objects constituting examples of handicrafts were also created in the camp. Most often, small items of jewellery are found in the form of rings (Fig. 4:2–3) or pendants (Fig. 4:1), sometimes associated with religious worship. The production of at least some items of this type directly in the camp is evidenced by finds of items, semi-finished items and production waste from animal bones (Fig. 4:4–7). During the research conducted in Barrack 26, among others, an ornament in the shape of a heart cut out of animal bone was found whereas within this barrack a fragment of a bone with a heart sketched on its surface, probably ready to be cut out in the future, was also found. This occurrence fits into the wider context of the phenomenon known as trench art (Myers 2007, 63). Finds of handmade jewellery or decorated objects are also examples of prisoners expression of self-assertion (Theune 2018, 129–136).

In addition to the above-mentioned information contained in the material from archaeological research in the BI section of the former Birkenau, one of the most important and interesting aspects of the analysis of artefacts for archaeologists and researchers is the possibility of linking them to specific people. Among similar, anonymous objects found, there are infrequently single objects that relate to specific people imprisoned in the camp, which makes these items even more valuable to us. Sometimes we know these people only by name, as in the case of the metal frame with a female name, Szidi (Fig. 5:1), or the four-leaf clover pendant with the date



Fig. 3. Selected finds from the excavations in former KL Auschwitz – II Birkenau: 1 – bottle, 2,3 – clothes hangers, 4 – lamp made of mackerel tin. Photo: P. Lewicki.

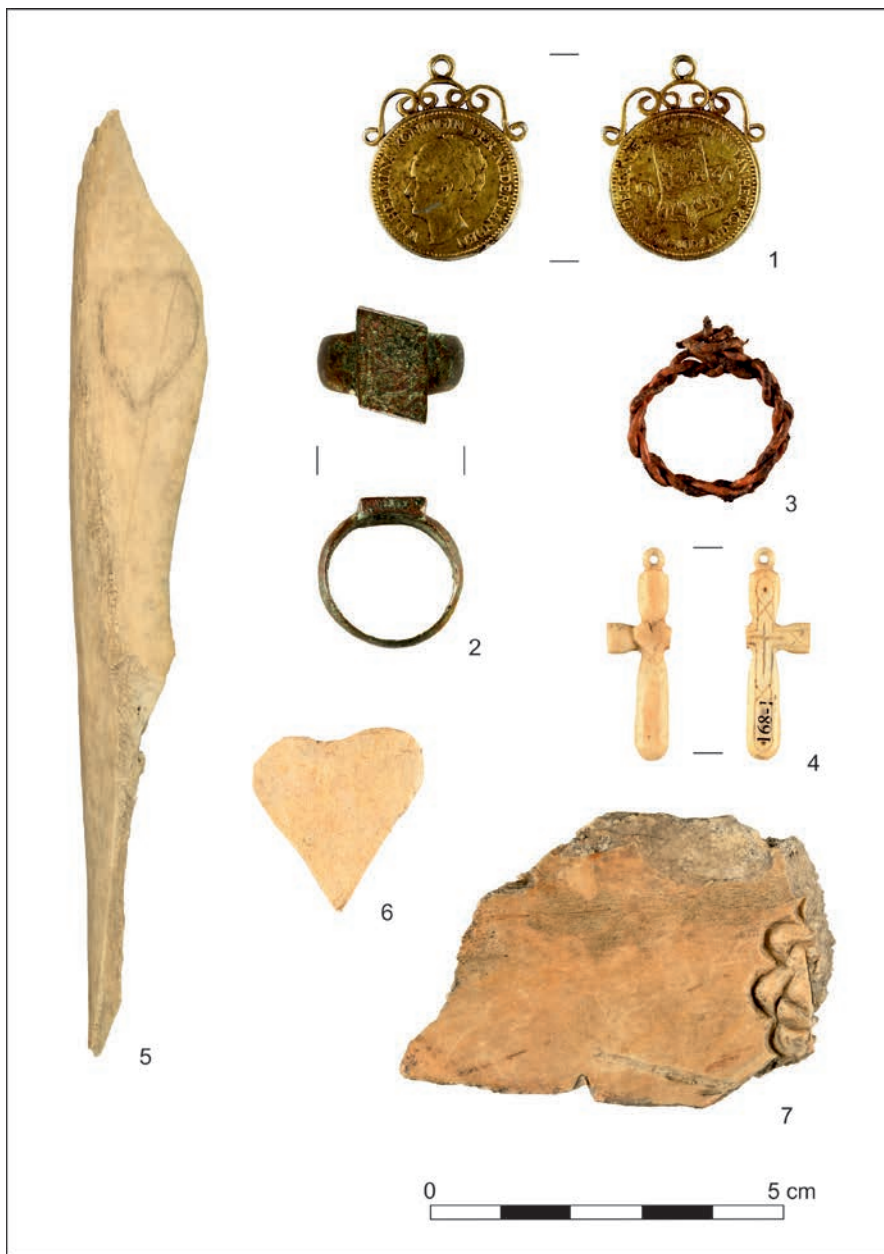


Fig. 4. Selected finds from the excavations in former KL Auschwitz – II Birkenau: 1 – pendant made of coin, 2 and 3 – rings, 4–7 – items and production waste from animal bones. Photo: P. Lewicki.

May 23, 1944 and a male name, Gerrit (Fig. 5:2). In exceptional cases, however, we can identify a specific person. This was the case with the penknife signed J. Zelikow (Fig. 5:3) and the patch with the prisoner number 15513 (Foks *et al.*, 2020, 92–93, 114–115). Discoveries of this type are extremely important, not only because of their rarity. They can also fill gaps in the archival documentation of the camp; something that can be particularly important, especially in the context of people looking for information about their relatives.

SUMMARY

Research conducted in places associated with 20th-century totalitarianism is special due to the emotional charge they carry. Thus, it is important that it is carried out as accurately as possible. In the case of research undertaken in the areas of former camps, archaeologists face the challenge of describing, classifying and securing thousands of items whose origin and function are ambiguous. Interpretations are often impeded by the disturbed contexts from which objects are drawn. The relatively short period of operation of the camps, the attempts to cover up traces of them, as well as the post-war activities within them do not help in consolidating the archaeological record. The stratigraphy is often strongly disturbed. Some items are buried in the humus layer or between the construction elements of the barracks. In addition, work with the material is impeded by the huge number of mass-produced items, often without individual characteristics. This not only creates problems in terms of the analysis of the investigated material, but also the costs and methods of their preservation and subsequent storage (cf., Müller 2017; Wiśniewski 2017). Archaeology of the 20th century is still relatively young. The researchers do not yet have good comparative material. There is a lack of syntheses and typological arrangements for many types of objects, especially the most common ones.

Nevertheless, the significant potential that lies in the discovered objects should be noted. Preliminary analyses of the material make it possible to determine the nature and manner of use of individual areas of the camp and provide information about the origin of the transports. They also provide an insight into the living conditions of the prisoners and how they struggled to preserve their humanity. The collections of artefacts thus acquired have invaluable research and educational worth. Their role in complementing our knowledge about various facets of the genocide that took place during World War II is increasing. They shall remain witnesses when all living witnesses are gone.



Fig. 5. Selected finds from the excavations in former KL Auschwitz – II Birkenau: 1 – frame, 2 – pendant, 3 – penknife. Photo: P. Lewicki.

REFERENCES

- Bartosik, I., Martyniak, Ł. and Setkiewicz, P. 2017. *Początki obozu Birkenau w świetle materiałów źródłowych*. Oświęcim.
- Bernbeck, R. 2018. An Emerging Archaeology of the Nazi Era. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47: 361–367.
- Blee, C. H. 1988. *Archaeological Investigations in Skagway, Alaska, Volume 2: The Moore Residences, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park*. Denver. Denver Service Center, National Park Service, Denver, Colorado.
- Burton, J. 1996. *Three Farewells to Manzanar: the Archeology of Manzanar National Historic Site*. Tucson, Arizona. Western Archeological and Conservation Center. Publications in Anthropology 67. doi:10.6067/XCV8DR2TCP
- Carr, G. 2018. The Small Things of Life and Death: An Exploration of Value and Meaning in the Material Culture of Nazi Camps. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 22: 531–552.
- Czech, D. 1992. *Kalendarz wydarzeń w KL Auschwitz*. Wydawnictwo Państwowego Muzeum w Oświęcimiu-Brzezince.
- Dębiński, J. 2014. *Komunistyczne obozy w Polsce pojaltańskiej*. Studia Włocławskie 16: 60–78.
- Duma, P. 2016. Archeologia w obliczu masowej produkcji przedmiotów na przykładzie byłego śmietnika w lesie rakowieckim we Wrocławiu. *Śląskie Sprawozdania Archeologiczne* 58: 227–246.
- Foks, S. 2018. Archeologia w miejscu pamięci Auschwitz – odkrywanie materialnych świadectw historii. *Memoria* 11 (08/2018).
- Foks, S., Lewicki, P., Mazurkiewicz, M. and Rolski, M. 2020. *Opracowanie wyników badań archeologicznych przeprowadzonych w rejonie baraków 7 (nr inw b-124) oraz 8 (nr inw b-123) zlokalizowanych na odcinku B1b byłego KL Auschwitz II – Birkenau w latach 2015 – 2020*. Typescript in the Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcimiu.
- Gilead, I., Haimi, Y. and Mazurek, W. 2009. Excavating Nazi Extermination Centres. *Present Past* 1: 10–39.
- Grzegorzczak, A. 2014. *Rzeczy zagłady*. Chełmno nad Nerem.
- Hausmair, B., Misterek, K. and Stern, J. 2021. Kategorisierung und Kategorien in der Archäologie der NS-Zeit. In Abar, A., D’Anna, M. B., Cyrus, G., Egbers, V., Huber, B., Kainert, C., Köhler, J., Ögüt, B., Rol, N., Russo, G., Schönicke, J. and Tourtet, F. (eds), *Pearls, Politics and Pistachios: Essays in Anthropology and Memories on the Occasion of Susan Pollock’s 65th Birthday*, 399–417. Heidelberg. Propylaeum.
- Hirte, R. 2000. *Offene Befunde - Ausgrabungen in Buchenwald: Zeitgeschichtliche Archäologie und Erinnerungskultur*. Braunschweig. Hinz und Kunst Graph. Werkstatt und Verl.-GmbH.
- Karski, K. 2019. *KL Plaszow. Archeologia miejsca pamięci*. Kraków.
- Karski, K. 2020. Archeologia nadmiaru. Podsumowanie wyników badań archeologicznych KL Plaszow z lat 2016–2019. *Krzyzstofory. Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa* 38: 41–68.
- Kersting, T. and Müller, A. K. 2015. Orte der Zeitgeschichte in der Landesarchäologie Brandenburg. Geschichte von oben oder von unten?. *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Archäologie des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* 28: 165–180.
- Kielar, W. 1976. *Anus Mundi*. Kraków.
- Kranz, T., Surdacka, A., Szymula, A. and Stein, M. 2018. *Wydobyte z popiołów: przedmioty osobiste ofiar niemieckiego obozu zagłady w Sobiborze*. Lublin.
- Levi, P. 2008. *Czy to jest człowiek?*. Kraków. Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Minta-Tworzowska, D. 2012. Klasyfikacja i typologia w archeologii. In S. Tabaczyński, A. Marciniak, D. Cyngot and A. Zalewska (eds), *Przeszłość społeczna. Próba konceptualizacji*, 409–428. Poznań.

- Müller, A. K. 2017. A tough choice? Suggestions for dealing with finds from the contemporary past. *Historische Archäologie* 1: 1–14.
- Myers, A. 2007. Portable Material Culture and Death Factory Auschwitz. *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 18: 57–69.
- Myers, A. 2013. *The Archaeology of Reform at a German Prisoner of War Camp in a Canadian National Park during the Second World War (1943–1945)*. Electronic document: <http://works.bepress.com/adrianmyers/32/> Accessed: 10. Dec. 2022.
- Schute, I. 2013a. *De vuilstort van Kamp Westerbork, Gemeente Aa en Hunze. Een archeologisch onderzoek*. RAAAP-Rapport 2575. The Westerbork Archaeological Research Project Volume 2.
- Schute, I. 2013b. *Comparison of artefacts from Camp Westerbork and Sobibor Establishing Research Potential (campaign autumn 2013)*. Electronic document: <http://sobibor.info.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Report-by-I.Schute-autumn-2013.pdf>. Accessed: 14 Dec. 2014.
- Schute, I. 2018. Collecting Artifacts on Holocaust Sites: A Critical Review of Archaeological Research in Ybenheer, Westerbork, and Sobibor. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 22: 593–613.
- Strzelecka, I. 1995. Budowa, rozbudowa oraz rozwój obozu i jego filii. In T. Świebocka (ed.), *Auschwitz 1940–1945. Węzłowe zagadnienia z dziejów obozu, t. 1 Założenie i organizacja obozu*, 49–98. Oświęcim-Brzezinka.
- Sturdy Colls, C. 2015. *Holocaust Archaeologies. Approaches and Future Directions*. New York.
- Theune, C. 2010. Historical Archaeology in National Socialist Concentration Camps in Central Europe. *Historische Archäologie* 2: 1–14.
- Theune, C. 2015. Archäologische Fundmassen und Massenfunde aus ehemaligen Konzentrationslager. *Fundberichte aus Österreich, Tagungsband 2*: 37–42.
- Theune, C. 2018. *A Shadow of War: Archaeological Approaches to Uncovering the Darker Sides of Conflict from the 20th Century*. Leiden.
- Wiśniewski, M. 2017. Selekcja zabytków „masowych” w badaniach archeologicznych – założenia i uwagi konserwatorskie do zagadnienia. *Ochrona Zabytków* 2: 155–174.