



# Nazi Camp-Site Archaeology in Brandenburg State, Germany

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**Abstract** The Brandenburg State Archaeology Museum has been conserving and analyzing relics of Nazi history for 25 years, and, as a result of this work, archaeology is now an integral part of Nazi-camp research (Kersting, Theune et al. 2016; Theune 2018). Many camp sites have been investigated, including concentration camps and their sub-camps, forced-labor camps, and prisoner-of-war camps (Kersting 2020, 2022). While most objects of 20th-century industrial culture can be quickly assigned a function, functions do change; such a shift is a characteristic of Nazi-camp finds and reflects their context of bondage and deprivation. The identification of the functions of material remains enables their association with different spheres of life in the camp so that both perpetrator and victim groups are documented archaeologically. Moreover, these finds serve as tangible evidence to refute any relativization of the crimes.

**Resumen** El Museo de Arqueología del Estado de Brandeburgo ha estado conservando y analizando reliquias de la historia nazi durante 25 años y, como resultado de este trabajo, la arqueología ahora es una parte integral de la investigación de los campos nazis (Kersting, Theune et al. 2016; Theune 2018). Se han

investigado muchos campos, incluidos los campos de concentración y sus subcampos, campos de trabajos forzados y campos de prisioneros de guerra (Kersting 2020, 2022). Si bien a la mayoría de los objetos de la cultura industrial del siglo XX se les puede asignar rápidamente una función, las funciones cambian; tal cambio es una característica de los hallazgos de los campos nazis y refleja su contexto de esclavitud y privación. La identificación de las funciones de los restos materiales permite su asociación con diferentes esferas de la vida en el campo, de manera que se documentan arqueológicamente tanto los grupos perpetradores como las víctimas. Además, estos hallazgos sirven como evidencia tangible para refutar cualquier relativización de los crímenes.

**Résumé** Le Musée d'archéologie de l'État du Brandebourg a conservé et analysé durant 25 ans des reliques de l'histoire nazie. En conséquence de ce travail, l'archéologie fait désormais partie intégrante de la recherche sur les camps nazis (Kersting, Theune et al. 2016; Theune 2018). De nombreux sites de camps ont fait l'objet de recherches, notamment les camps de concentration et leurs camps auxiliaires, les camps de travail forcé et ceux des prisonniers de guerre (Kersting 2020, 2022). Si la plupart des objets de la culture industrielle du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle peuvent rapidement se voir attribuer une fonction, les fonctions montrent une évolution. Un tel déplacement est une caractéristique des découvertes faites dans les camps nazis et il reflète leur contexte d'asservissement et de

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privation. L'identification des fonctions des vestiges matériels permet leur association à différentes sphères de la vie dans le camp afin que les groupes tant des criminels que des victimes puissent être documentés d'un point de vue archéologique. De surcroît, ces découvertes servent de preuves tangibles permettant de réfuter toute relativisation des crimes.

**Keywords** concentration camps · forced-labor camps · archaeology · Brandenburg · function shift of find material · spheres of life in camps

## Introduction

Beneath the visible landscape lie numerous layers, invisible at first sight: this is a familiar thought to archaeologists. That the entire landscape is more or less “contaminated” with the history of terror, with its abuse for purposes of the exclusion, exploitation, and acceptance of the complete annihilation of people, is a thought that imposes itself when trying to trace the sites of terror in the landscape (Bernbeck [2017:7], after Pollack [2014:53], who also takes a decidedly archaeological perspective). The variety of archaeological monuments from 20th-century wars preserved in the soil of the federal state of Brandenburg is extensive and includes examples from the military-weapons industry, traces of the war itself (crashed airplanes, trenches), relics of terror (mainly camps and industrial grounds), and of suppression by the National Socialist (NS) dictatorship in East Germany. Many of these have already been investigated by researchers with the Archäologisches Landesmuseum Brandenburg (Brandenburg State Archaeology Museum) over the last 25 years (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:187–221; Kersting 2022); for examples from Berlin, which is a separate federal state with its own heritage management; see Haubold-Stolle et al. (2020:170–186). Ten years ago, the publishing of *Archaeologies of Internment* (Myers and Moshenska 2011) came too early to take notice of National Socialist-camp archaeology in Brandenburg State, so this gap can now be filled.

## What Are Camps?

The 20th century is considered the “century of camps” (Kotek and Rigoulot 2001). This article

is intended to make available the archaeological knowledge about camp sites of the World War II era in the state of Brandenburg (Fig. 1), knowledge that has been stored in the archives and magazines of the Brandenburg State Archaeology Museum. It does not replace a scientific reappraisal of the relevant features and finds, nor is it a comprehensive comparison with historical sources. My goal is to make accessible, for those interested, information about a ubiquitous type of monument that has been generated by numerous archaeological investigations since the 1990s in Brandenburg State (and greater Berlin, too). The findings I discuss are also the subject of the exhibition: *Ausgeschlossen. Archäologie der NS-Zwangslager* (Exclusion. Archaeology of NS Forced Camps), produced by the Brandenburg State Archaeology Museum and the Dokumentationszentrum NS-Zwangsarbeit (Nazi Forced-Labor Documentation Center) in Berlin Schöneeweide, which opened in May 2020.

Though “NS forced-labor camps” encompass quite different categories within Brandenburg, the material remnants will be viewed, as a whole, from an archaeological perspective, always mindful of the historical and theoretical attention that has been devoted to this topic (Kotek and Rigoulot 2001; Greiner and Kramer 2013). It is always about areas with temporary limits that define an inside and an outside, where groups of people were included and excluded at the same time. The Nazi camps can be described as “no-go landscapes” to which only perpetrators and victims had access—and the latter usually had no possibility of escape. Thus is a “terror landscape” defined (Kersting 2015:57).

The focus here is on the domestic development of confinement infrastructure during the Nazi period in the form of early concentration camps, the later large concentration camps and their satellite camps, World War II prisoner-of-war camps, forced-labor camps, so-called labor-education camps, and other Nazi-period categories. As archaeologists, the obfuscating terminology of the time, on the one hand, should be avoided, but, on the other, because one and the same camp typically had multiple functions, held different groups of people, and was characterized by varying conditions, either sequentially or simultaneously, use of the terminology at times cannot be helped.

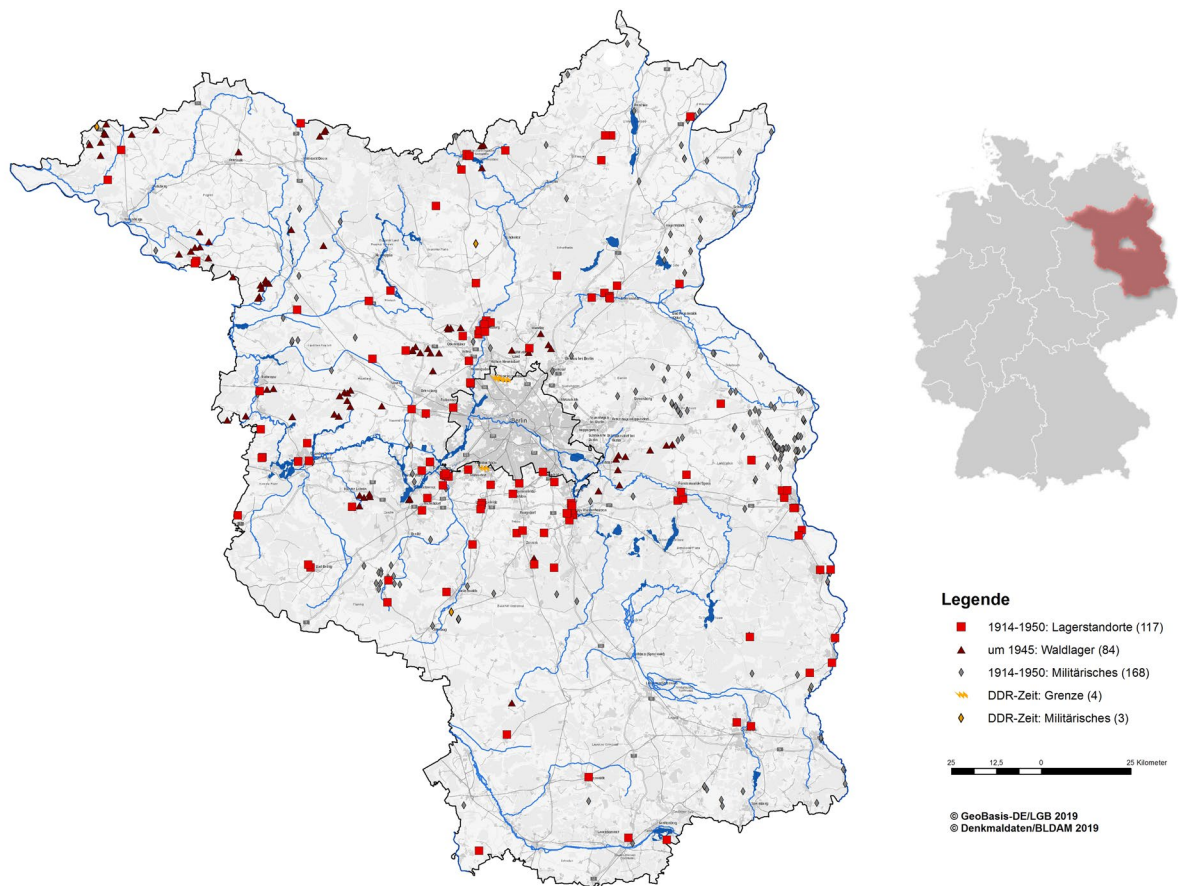


**Fig. 1** Map of Brandenburg State (*left*) showing monuments of 20th-century archaeology, and (*right*) map of Germany showing the location of Brandenburg State. (Image courtesy

of the Brandenburgisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologisches Landesmuseum, 2019.)

### What Are the Sources for Camp Archaeology?

“Camp Archaeology” serves both the legal and social mandate of monument protection and of scientific interest. The present study conceives the aim of camp archaeology as being the recording, in systematic fashion, of the camp sites in Brandenburg. To that end, a wide range of sources is available, consisting of very different institutions and social groups with interests that vary considerably. For the Brandenburg State Archaeological Museum the exact locations of the sites are of supreme importance because these data provide the basis for the listing and protection of the material resources as archaeological monuments. In order to unearth information that is often hidden, all sources have to be evaluated carefully and compared with each other, as the exact location of

the crime scenes (for that is what they are) is often of only secondary importance in written sources and historical investigations. In these, of course, the suffering of the victims and the crimes of the perpetrators are more important.

In the standard works on the concentration camps in the state of Brandenburg—Benz and Distel (2005–2009), mainly volumes 3 and 4 on the Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Buchenwald camp systems (Benz and Distel 2006a, 2006b)—location information is mentioned only rarely and in those few cases without much precision (as is the case with documents in the large databases of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). Sometimes historians write such things as “nothing reminds of the history” or “nothing is left there” because they do not bear in mind the fact that the archaeologist’s work

typically begins under those circumstances (Schute 2017:3). The compilations of the Federal Agency for Civic Education on the memorials of Nazi crimes (Puvogel 1999:279–378) and the Brandenburg State Agency for Civic Education (Scheer 2003) sometimes provide references to locations. The historical reappraisals and directories of historical sources (files, etc.) of the Berlin and Brandenburg state archives (Kubatzki 2001; Meyer and Neitmann 2001; Bräutigam 2003) and of the memorial sites (Morsch and Ohm 2014) sometimes give postal addresses of places where forced laborers were held, but these often concern accommodations in existing buildings and are not a topic for archaeology. For pinpointing locations, a search of historical aerial photographs and the creation of digital terrain models are necessary to guide fieldwork. Allied images from the 1940s and the Soviet aerial survey of 1953 are available from the Landesvermessung und Geobasisinformation Brandenburg (State Survey and Geobasis Information Brandenburg) in Potsdam, but they are of course not comprehensive and are not thematically indexed in any way.

For places in the immediate vicinity of Berlin, the timeline function (click the “Time” button) on the Google Earth homepage, <<https://earth.google.com/web/>>, can also be used as a source. Integrated there are the 1953 images of Berlin, which usually show a belt of some 100 m outside the city limits where the remains of many camps were located. The 1:10,000 topographic maps from the era of the German Democratic Republic, which are also available in digital form, often offer valuable information about remaining and converted camp buildings and paths, fire-water ponds, etc., most of which no longer exist aboveground.

Information from local initiatives supplements the visual evidence because the knowledge of the existence of such places has often been passed down through the generations (Pollack 2014:71). Local histories, self-published in very limited runs and of low coverage, are often very informative because the authors typically go into great detail. The published research is supplemented by Websites of amateur researchers, which sometimes provide quite valuable location information (this is also where the gray or, perhaps better, “brown” zone of “dark tourism” begins, where places of the Nazi era are brought to the attention of an interested public [Bernbeck

2017:415]), as do people involved in the geocaching scene, who sometimes discover sites that scholars have not found yet. Another resource consists of the youth projects of the Landesjugendring Brandenburg (Brandenburg State Youth Council). These projects, funded by the council through various mechanisms, enable schoolchildren to explore the local past, visit local camp sites, and interview contemporary witnesses, gathering photographs and recording oral history. The Brandenburg State Archaeology Museum has recognized the potential here and invites the youth groups to the museum, where researchers explain how contemporary archaeology works and give the young people the opportunity to “grasp” history with the help of actual artifacts; in return, the young people share their local knowledge. Finally, volunteers and metal detectorists from the state archaeological museum who are interested in the topic send find reports of camp sites to researchers at the museum. The reports can then be verified professionally and eventually protected legally.

All of the scholarly activity has the aim of registering camp sites as archaeological monuments on the Brandenburg State Monument List in order to ensure their permanent preservation. However, an equally important goal must be communicating information, whether at the original site, in the state archaeological museum, or in appropriate formats at the memorial sites. Along these lines, scholars investigating the remnants of German internment camps on the British Channel Islands, for example, recommend taking a “non-invasive approach” (Sturdy-Colls and Colls 2013:128; Carr and Jasinski 2014; Carr et al. 2018).

### What Is the Approach?

By definition, archaeology deals with the material record, and we archaeologists thus do not need to make a “material turn” to research history (Bernbeck 2017:222)—it is “normality” (Schute 2017:6). Our subject is “the people and not the pots,” which has often been emphasized. For those of us who are archaeologists of war and terror, the knowledge of the fates of our research objects can be emotionally burdensome. But it is a great opportunity, namely in terms of public perception (Kersting 2020; Meller and Bunnefeld 2020:103). From a purely legalistic point of view, archaeological heritage management is

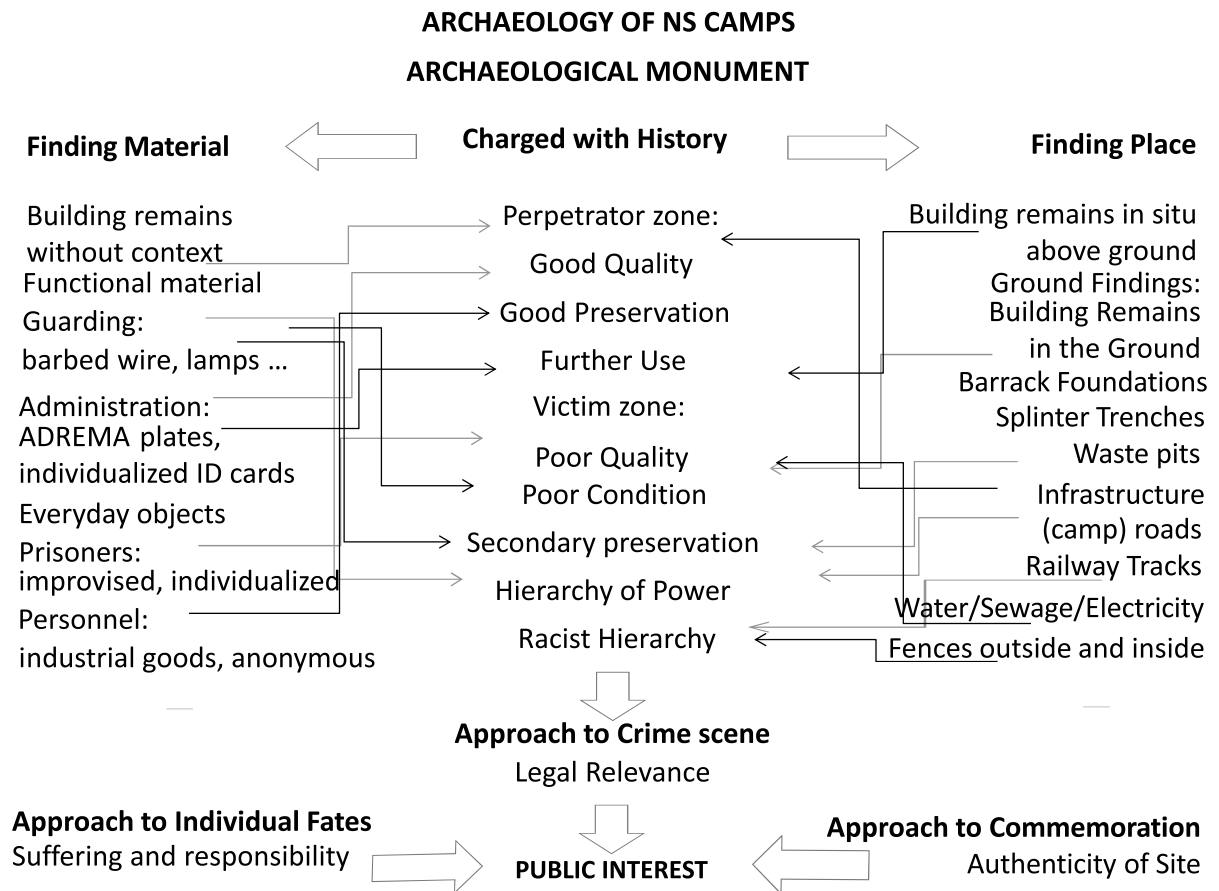


**Fig. 2** Archaeology of forced-labor camps. (Graphic by author, 2019.)

conducted in the public interest, but the interest of the public in the topics of archaeology that are close in time is quite different than its interest in the topics of the archaeology of prehistoric times.

The material remnants are always directly linked to certain people and their fates. This is true not only for the Nazi era, but here the historical context is more or less known (on the many interrelated questions connected with this issue, see Bernbeck [2017:92]). The structures of archaeological monuments are “charged” with fate and history (Hirte 1999:77). This has an effect on both the characterization of the material finds and the structures of the features of the type of archaeological monument under study (Fig. 2); it can be the case that finds are evidence and features are crime scenes (Wagner 2016:170).

This situation, in contrast to conventional monuments, means that the public’s interest often moves early (too early) in the direction of “creating a

memorial site,” with the supposed “authenticity” of the site providing the justification, as Ivar Schute (2017:4) describes for the Netherlands. The finds themselves are emotionalizing to an extent unknown elsewhere in archaeology, and in many cases can even be personalized (for example, provided with inscriptions, etc.), that is, associated with individuals and their fates.

In the camps, the prisoners and forced laborers spent a significant part of their everyday lives separated into groups according to political and racial criteria. The structural conditions, infrastructure, and organization of the camps directly influenced their chances of survival. For this reason, the structural features of the camps, notably their configuration and differentiation of space according to function, must also be examined.

Archaeological heritage management is concerned with material legacies that are present in the

terrain—“covered by soil or water,” according to the Brandenburg Monument Protection Act (Denkmalste. org 2004:section 2)—and that have an historical and scientific value, thus being worthy of protection. For the Brandenburg State Archaeology Museum, the objects associated with the war and Nazi period are easy to handle because they can be protected, researched, and excavated without public opposition, and because there is a genuine public interest in them. The original sites and their material legacies are indispensable today for the political education of future generations, precisely because of the violent crimes and suffering associated with them. The desire for vivid visualization has led to the rediscovery of a multitude of previously unnoticed sites. Local citizen initiatives, some of which were mentioned above, have made a significant contribution in the search for traces. The twofold function and effect of archaeology, material and social, consist precisely of making visible again what has been hidden. Camp sites and their history thus become anchored in the public consciousness. The visual and demonstrative value, that is, the “comprehensibility,” of the remains of the original camps is especially evident when young people are being introduced to the topic. So it is a matter of real social concern to which archaeology can (finally!) contribute something positive: the enhancement of political education.

### What Is Involved?

The vast majority of reports on camps, standard works as well as literature, eyewitness accounts, and memoirs, almost never deal with the material inventory of buildings, facilities, structural design, furnishings, everyday objects, and so forth. Usually the specific location, the “site of the camp,” is not even mentioned. Of course, the focus is always on people and their fates, but archaeology has another approach, the investigation of material remnants, which will become more important in the future as eyewitnesses pass away.

In terms of the archaeological traces of camp sites that could be recognized as monuments, those of the so-called hall camps in buildings do not meet the criteria of archaeology. The types of buildings that were used ranged from schools, gymnasiums, inns, and cinemas to stables on farms (Bräutigam 2003:35); hall

camps, common in the early period (and that continued in use to some extent), are not considered potential monuments because the buildings are still standing. Only after parts of a camp site are no longer above-ground or are submerged in water can they become objects of archaeological monument preservation according to the definition in the monuments law. For example, a Spree or Havel river barge in which forced laborers were held, as was the case in Spreenhagen (Weigelt 2006:272), that sank to the bottom could be declared an archaeological monument. On the other hand, sites such as that of the tragedy of the Lost Transport of Tröbitz, where those who died during the odyssey of a concentration-camp train were discovered (Arlt 2011), are considered intangible memorial sites, since the material traces of what happened are missing (though they may yet be found). For this reason, this discussion is about camp objects usually erected on open spaces or in the forest that were later partly or completely removed, dismantled, destroyed, or built over—often because the barracks could be used elsewhere.

The remnants of former forced-labor camps, as is the case with archaeological monuments from other periods, can be located in places where nothing at all has been found so far other than convincing indications of the existence of the original site (for example, historic town centers that are centuries old). A site having been built over, on the other hand, is by no means proof of the absence of original remnants below ground, as many years of experience have shown. The digital surface model provides a deeper level of evidence, that is, traces in the relief of the terrain, such as barracks and fire-water ponds. Whether these were observed in the terrain itself or only in the model is irrelevant in terms of their monument character. Even if remnants are recognizable in the field, it frequently is the case that they have not been archaeologically documented in any way. For example, building floors, pathways, foundations, cellars, and portions of the sanitary facilities are often still partially visible aboveground. Other barrack sites are recognizable through terracing, terrain cuts, or even treeless places in wooded areas. The range extends from standing buildings to structures of which there are no traces either on the ground surface or belowground.

## When Is Excavation Needed?

In Brandenburg State, many excavations are triggered by so-called linear measures (for example, road construction or power/gas/water lines); these were the reason for the first excavations at Stalag Luckenwalde and Camp Uckermark. Largescale pipeline relocations necessitated the investigations in Hohensaaten, Brieskow-Finkenheerd, and Groß Schönebeck, and the construction of small pipelines and roads impacted the sites of the camps of Bergolz-Rehbrücke and Jamlitz, and again and again of the memorial sites. The destruction of sites as a result of development is not uncommon: the remnants of the Rathenow satellite camp and other areas of Stalag Luckenwalde fell victim to the construction of largescale industrial facilities. The area of Stalag Fürstenberg/Oder near Eisenhüttenstadt was cleared for commercial development that has not yet taken place. The Siemens camp, Dreilinden in Kleinmachnow, was destroyed prior to the construction of a residential development, and a similar project affected the sparse remnants of a Heinkelwerke camp in Sachsenhausen.

Many of the archaeological monitoring projects at camp sites have been concerned with the renovation or redesign of the elements of memorial sites, such as paths, open spaces, and barrack areas, with only a few projects having had as their aim the investigation of specific features. It may be surprising, but to date there have been no research excavations at NS-camp sites in Brandenburg other than those at the Tempelhof Airfield in Berlin by R. Bernbeck (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:117–180). However, experts have led excavations as part of youth camps, such as in Stalag Mühlberg, Ravensbrück, and Treuenbrietzen. Finally, noninvasive research, that is, without excavation, as in the case of the Mahlow forced-laborer hospital, can also bring a forgotten camp site back into consciousness.

As of the current year (2021), 85 archaeological excavations have been conducted at camp sites, almost always during or prior to construction. Of these, 27 have taken place in Oranienburg alone, in the various Sachsenhausen concentration-camp sites, and 15 in Fürstenberg at the various Ravensbrück concentration-camp sites. Half of all documentation took place at these two places combined. If one adds the large prisoner-of-war camps Frankenfelde, Eisenhüttenstadt, and Mühlberg, two-thirds of the excavations

have taken place at the “large camps,” some of which are also memorials. Archaeological investigation of the sites of memorial centers, which Schute (2017:2) notes as having been part of his practice in the Netherlands and Poland, has also been a significant component of the work done in Brandenburg State. Investigations of about 15 other forced-labor camps, some of which are quite large, account for the remaining third; a large proportion of these sites are the so-called forgotten camp sites (Schute 2017:3). Since the mid-1990s, when camp-site excavations began, their annual number rose to a peak in the early 2000s, with over 10 per year. At that point a satisfactory level of stabilization and updating was probably reached; since that time the number of excavations per year has varied from two to five. In 2020, excavations were carried out for the first time at industrial sites where forced laborers worked.

Due to the limited nature of the documentation generated by archaeological mitigation of construction work, the opportunities for insight are often narrow and few, which, however, does not mean that no results were recorded. Conversely, quite a few documented investigations at known camp sites with confirmed locations did not report any archaeological finds or features. In the Heinkellager Sachsenhausen 37, for example, only a few features were documented (two concrete foundations, brick bases, and a wall corner), all of which were subsequently destroyed by the construction work. When the State Archaeological Museum consequently canceled the registering of the archaeological monument, the property owner removed the commemorative sign as if the historical site was no longer—or never had been—there.

Many of the camp sites that have been located have not yielded any finds at all yet, either because no archaeological mitigation has taken place to date or because only walkover surveys have been conducted. It may be that the sites have been completely built over and are no longer accessible on the surface. Traces and remnants may still be present below-ground, however, so it is possible these sites will be registered as archaeological monuments at some point.

## What Are the Structures that Have Been Found?

The focus here is on the monuments that have been preserved in the field and are visible to some

extent, that can be recognized in the digital surface model, or that have been documented during specific archaeological investigations in Brandenburg State. Broadly speaking, features consist of those camp components that can be seen in contemporary photographs, both aerial and other types, even if their preservation in the ground cannot be assessed today. There is at least evidence that they existed. These are distinguished from those that are only depicted on plans and that may or may not have been built. A methodologically important observation made in Ravensbrück as early as the 1990s applies here in general: A chronological classification of the findings could not always be made clearly, since, on the one hand, the changes to the building fabric toward the end of the war and through the subsequent use of the site after 1945 were very close together in time. On the other hand, some of the camp-era infrastructure and building fabric has been used, maintained, and changed up to the present.

Complete ground plans of camps are usually not excavated archaeologically, but the aerial photographs taken by the Allies, which are frequently available in archives in Brandenburg, offer a large number of examples both up to and after the end of World War II. The modern forced-labor camps were evidently always tailored to the available plots of land and invested according to plan, and could therefore be triangularly curved (Eberswalde), curved semicircular (Niemegk), form regular roundels (Dabendorf), or be radially arranged around a central watchtower, as in Sachsenhausen. Examination of the layouts of the camps suggests that the overriding concern was less about design (as perhaps in Sachsenhausen) and more the minimizing of expenditures, for example, for the water-/sewage-pipe network and the security infrastructure.

The remnants and traces of buildings and other camp facilities can be categorized as follows:

- Enclosure and security infrastructure: gate, towers, fencing, internal demarcation
- Functional buildings: commandant's office, kitchen, laundry, workshops, one-man bunkers
- Shelters: barracks, foundations, floors, sanitary areas, tent sites
- Religious buildings: churches in Eisenhüttenstadt and Frankfurt an der Oder

- Infrastructure: water/sewage pipes, electricity transmission lines, roads, paths, squares, railroad tracks

- Open spaces: paving, leveling, flowerbeds

- Layered features: burnt layers, ground leveling

- Belowground structures: cellars, bunkers

- Dug-in structures: splinter trenches, bomb craters, fire-water ponds, rubbish pits

- Terror sites: murder and extermination sites, human ashes in the ground

## What Things Have Been Found?

Concentration-camp prisoners had everything taken from them, with the exception of combs, soap, and toothbrushes. It was essential for survival to possess a bowl, a cup, and a spoon because otherwise it was impossible to be given the camp soup; Elie Wiesel recounts the trauma he experiences when he “inherits” a spoon and knife from his father at the moment when the two are separated (Bernbeck 2017:200). Prisoners of war possessed little more than their uniforms and boots and what they carried in knapsacks and the pockets of their trousers. The forced laborers who were deported to Germany and put into camps had, at best, a suitcase or a small bundle of clothes with them. In Eastern Europe, many people were picked up in street raids in their hometowns and were not given the time to pack even the bare necessities for the journey to Germany.

During excavations numerous artifacts were recovered from the sites of the former camps. The spectrum ranges from barrack building materials related to electricity- and water-supply and incarceration infrastructure (insulators, barbed wire) to objects of daily use (soup bowls and spoons, drinking cups, and military eating utensils) to the belongings of the camp inmates (combs, toothbrushes, tokens, writing utensils, and name tags). Many things from the time of the camps have decomposed: finds of paper and other organic materials, for example, are very rare. The finds reference the life of the “excluded” (Bernbeck 2017:21,98); the structure, administration, and after use of the camps; and the actions of the guards, as well, with the involvement of German society in the exploitation and terror system of the camps. They serve as reminders of the camp sites, which can be characterized as concrete crime scenes, but, above

all, of the people who were enclosed there by camp fences, forcibly excluded from the German national community, but who remained available for exploitation through forced labor for the benefit of that community. Likewise, the finds are a reminder that certain people organized this exclusion and exploitation, and thus became perpetrators. A very large number of Germans consciously profited from forced labor.

The archaeological sources cannot bear witness directly to either the actions of the perpetrators or to the experiences of the victims, however. The potential of the objects lies rather in the fact that their presence confronts the public with the history of the camps. Their specific materiality enables an unusual, nonlinear approach to history (Korff and Roth 1990:15). In addition to their scientific quality, the finds also have an emotional quality, as they are directly connected to people and fates; Bernbeck (2017:95) notes their potential for evocation. The fact that they disappeared into the earth for a long time before being found again adds to them layers of meaning of forgetting and remembering. This generally distinguishes them from the many objects in the memorial magazines that were never stored in the ground. Hirte (1999:77) puts it this way: “By finding, recovering and preserving, that is, by perceiving the things, the devalued objects are given back some of their dignity, the symbolic annihilation (Assmann 1995:12) of them is undone to some extent. In this respect, the process of excavation is in itself a form of commemoration.” The finds do make the place visible again and thus also the victims and the perpetrators. They vouch for the conditions and the people who experienced them. This “vouching for” is one of the most important functions of these archaeological sources (Bernbeck 2017:11,131).

The “open-endedness of meaning of things” (Drecolt 2017:110) entails the risk that the “things” will be interpreted differently. Archaeology, for its part, cannot provide definitive answers. It embarks on a search for clues and tries to identify indications of the function and use, context, and production of the finds, and to develop an eye for details. In the process it also becomes clear that archaeologists do not (yet) know much about the people in the camps or about the camps themselves. Thus it is a matter of “extracting” the “stored knowledge” from the objects (Keller-Drescher 2010:243). Their significance lies in the historical event to which they refer,

not in themselves, because “remnants exhibited as sources can easily become relics,” and “objects cannot narrate, they are rather occasions for narratives” (Hoffmann 2007:208). They do not speak of their own accord, but they can be made to tell their stories (Loistl 2016). They testify just as much about perpetrators or profiteers as about victims. They cannot always be clearly attributed; it is impossible to say with certainty whether a spoon was used in the camp by a guard or by a forced laborer housed there. Because it was found in a camp it points to the existence of the camp and to the different living conditions of the people in it. Other things are more clearly identifiable by the way they were made or by their marking, for example, with a prisoner number.

In contrast to those items in the depots and collections of the memorial sites and museums, the finds have survived by chance. They have not been given to the memorial sites by contemporary witnesses or their descendants or survived in the memorial collections of things taken away from the prisoners (Schulz and Rositzki 2021). All the found objects are or were buried in the ground as rubbish and forgotten. Their selection is associated with the “rubbish phase,” that is, the process of being thrown away (Ludwig 2015:432). They did not seem worth keeping after the liberation of the camps. This is precisely what makes them special today: “For the objects recovered from the earth receive special attention precisely because of their temporary, often long-term disappearance and reappearance. They are alienated because, as a rule, ... [they are] fragmented” (Bernbeck 2017:193). The salvaged things are marked by their use and survival in the earth. Precisely because they look different from when they were in use, they reveal their historicity and refer to individuals through their material properties, traces of use, and modes of function and use (Ludwig 2015:444). Self-made objects—and many industrially produced things—were created, used, transformed, or marked by specific people, either an individual or several individuals in succession or simultaneously. The objects are more than artifacts; they had a “social life” (Ludwig 2015:438). Carr (2018:533) provides an instructive figure that makes clear the “value” of the finds, which varies from practical value to economic, scientific, and commemorative value.

The fact that many items are mass-produced industrial goods, which initially can hardly be dated

more precisely than the mid-20th century, and often even the determination of industrial semi-products is difficult (Poggel 2020:11), has resulted in such finds being recovered only in (small) numbers, almost as “voucher pieces” and *pars pro toto* (Bernbeck 2017:133). That masses of people were kept in the camps, either at the same time or sequentially, does ensure “find masses” (Theune 2015:37), however. Still in full operation at the end of the war, the camps and everything in them were often leveled shortly afterward; inventory, accessories, and rubbish were deposited belowground and thus “archaeologized” (Theune 2015:39). In most cases, excavations have placed and continue to place a very strong emphasis on individualized and/or homemade or adapted pieces. These are undoubtedly archaeologically recovered historical testimonies of the highest value, but the other mass-produced items do have a high potential for analysis, if they are excavated as is customary in other periods, namely, all of them and with 3-D measurements being recorded. This was not feasible, due to limited numbers of personnel and capacity of the state-museum magazines (Müller 2010), with the excavations discussed in this article, almost all of which were undertaken as part of rescue archaeology projects under construction-site conditions, but should become common practice (Bernbeck 2017:100). The potential of single-find mapping became visible in the excavations of Reinhard Bernbeck in Berlin-Tempelhof; the analysis will probably continue for a long time, but it has shown some promising initial results (Theune 2015:41; Bernbeck 2017:35,283).

## What Do the Finds Communicate?

### Material Remnants and Camp Types

The question of the function of material remnants, that is, archaeological finds and features, in relation to the different camp types is a salient one. Are there finds and features that are characteristic of concentration camps and their satellite sites, forced-labor camps, and prisoner-of-war camps? Archaeological investigations at sites of all these types of camps have produced substantial assemblages, even if none of the sites could be investigated completely. Among the features and finds encountered, some are ubiquitous:

in the former category, for example, are the remnants of barracks, sanitary areas, water-supply and waste-disposal systems, infrastructure, and fences; and in the latter are canteen and enamel dishes, military eating and cooking utensils, combs, makeshift self-made items, and souvenirs or mementos from home, as well as all kinds of sheet-metal tags (Fig. 3).

Features among the archaeological remnants attesting to racist practices are of special interest. These are (1) remnants of extermination facilities (or processes) documented in the concentration camps (Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Jamlitz) and in the “euthanasia site” in Brandenburg an der Havel; only at these three sites were secretly buried human remains found as well; (2) barbed wire from fences, found almost everywhere; methodically buried barbed wire is considered an indication of the presence of Soviet prisoners of war. So far, such features have been documented in concentration camps (Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück), prisoner-of-war camps (Eisenhüttenstadt [Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:214] and Frankenfelde), and in a forced-labor camp (Kleinmachnow), that is, in all three camp categories; and (3) inferior pile-grate foundations of barracks found in concentration camps (Sachsenhausen, Uckermark, and Jamlitz) and in forced-labor camps (Kleinmachnow, Rathenow, Hohensaaten, Germendorf, Brieskow-Finkenheerd, and Wilhelmshorst), but to date not found in any of the three large prisoner-of-war camps.

Objects that indicate the differential treatment of persons are often found as well. A wide variety of sheet-metal stamps of all kinds, bearing numbers and names, are considered typical camp finds (Hausmair 2018). They can be assigned a specific function of oppression and alienation if they are stamps (*Effektenmarken*) that inmates received as “receipts” for handing over all their belongings. Such stamps have been found in concentration camps (Sachsenhausen) and in forced-labor camps (Rathenow, Treuenbrietzen, Hohensaaten, Germendorf, and Brieskow-Finkenheerd), but not in any prisoner-of-war camp, where people apparently kept the things they brought with them. Tin badges that are official military identification badges (associated with soldiers from all the Allied countries except the Soviet Union), on the other hand, have been found in the large main camps of Frankenfelde, Eisenhüttenstadt, and Mühlberg (here buttons from the uniforms of foreign soldiers are also found), but not

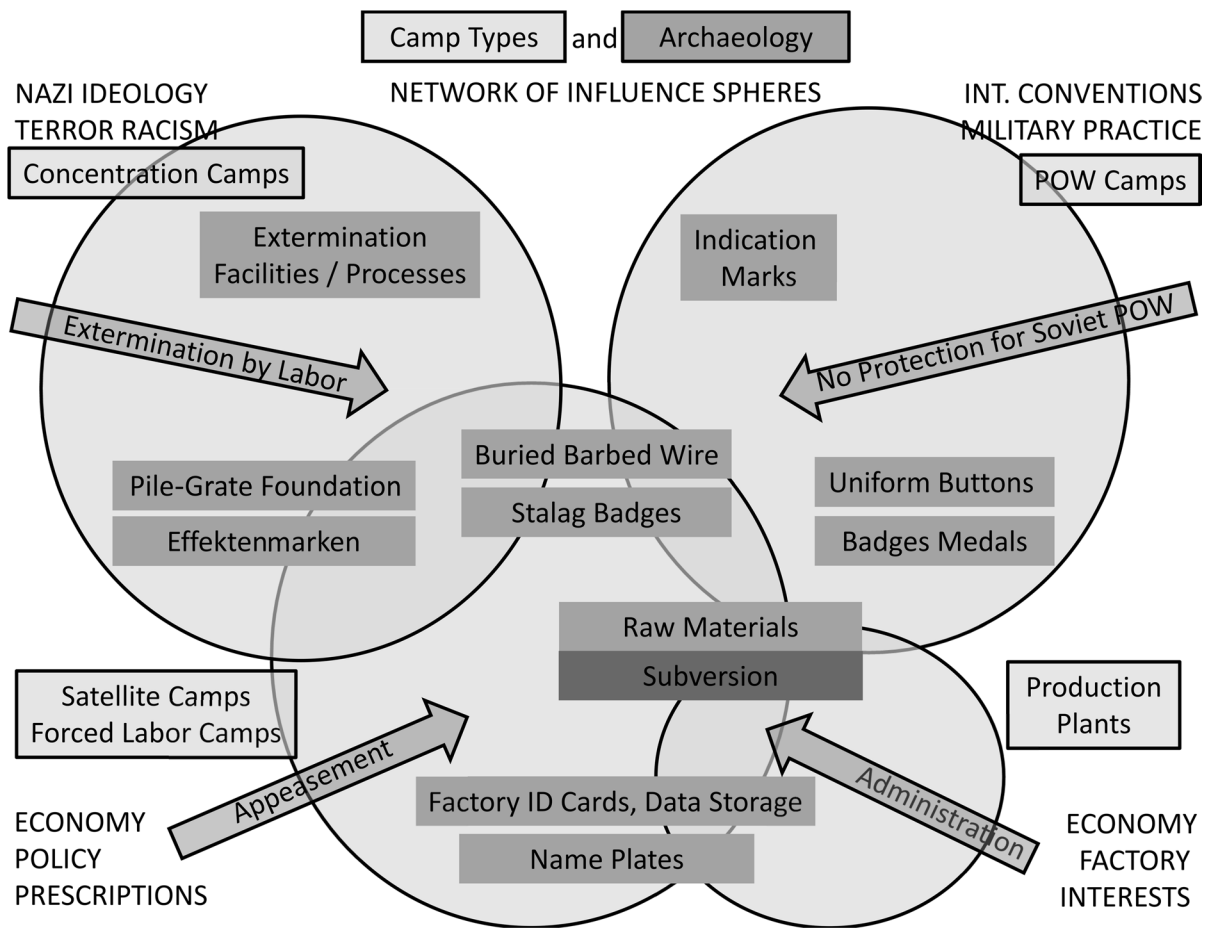


**Fig. 3** Camp types and archaeology in the network of influences. (Graphic by author, 2021.)

in other types of camp. So-called stalag badges, issued by the Wehrmacht as military identification tags for captured Soviet soldiers, have been found wherever those soldiers were present: the large prisoner-of-war camps, the concentration camps (Sachsenhausen), and the forced-labor camps (Rathenow and Hohensaaten). Self-made, decorated tin nameplates of French prisoners, sometimes with stalag numbers, that is, made by prisoners of war, seem to be specific to the Rathenow forced-labor camp, although very similar nameplates have been found in the Mauthausen concentration camp (Hausmair 2018). Objects not pointing to the treatment of people but to their activities are raw-material remnants from the workplace. Mostly made of metal, originating directly from the production process, these were found primarily in forced-labor camps (Rathenow,

Kleinmachnow, and Treuenbrietzen) associated with factories. Objects made from such remnants, on the other hand, can be found practically everywhere, including in the concentration “main camps” (the satellite camps were established at company or factory sites). Only in the forced-labor camps associated with large armament factories (Treuenbrietzen and Brandenburg-Neuendorf) or, more precisely, in their administrative areas of the factories, name-bearing “storage media” metal plates have been found. The same is true of access-authorizing factory ID cards, which so far have only been found in a waste-disposal area near Rathenow.

In this context, the meaning of material remnants can be determined when the remnants are quite typical of certain categories of camps, such as traces and remnants of extermination facilities

and processes (for concentration camps), identification marks (for prisoner-of-war camps), and data-storage or access authorizations (for forced-labor camps associated with large factories, especially the production and administrative areas). On the other hand, specific material remnants are often those that mark groups of persons, reflecting their exposure to different spheres of influence, such as Nazi racist ideology, military practice and international conventions, economic interests, and policy prescriptions. At the same time there are material residues that arise from the self-interests of different groups of people, such as (1) the racist intention of exclusion and extermination (evidenced by barbed wire, stalag marks, and pile-grate foundations) combined with the economic concern for minimizing expenses that was responsible for the treatment of Soviet prisoners, who were not protected by any international convention (later the Italian military internees would likewise lack protection); (2) the intention to record and administer (expressed in the data storage by means of the ADREMA<sup>1</sup> boards and the authorization of access by means of factory passes), which affected all those working for a larger company, even those forced to so; and (3) the intention to survive, which becomes visible in the diversion or theft of material and production remnants for adaptation and reuse, and which spread subversively from the group of those people who had access to the material.

So at last it is specific groups of people who become visible via the archaeological inventory of the various camps, such as Soviet prisoners of war and “Eastern workers.” These particular groups were not mobile, yet were not associated exclusively with a specific camp type; their presence is indicated by specific structural interventions (pile-grate foundations, buried barbed wire) and portable items (stalag marks). Other excluded groups become visible through their interest-driven actions, particularly those associated with a high degree of risk, which left behind specific find material (material remnants).

## Material Remnants and Their Functions in Camps

Based on a material-based categorization of the find spectrum, Table 1 shows the association of finds with different functions in the camps. This is almost always possible with finds produced in the 20th century, unlike with prehistoric and early historical finds. For the functional categories of buildings/furnishings, food, personal hygiene, clothing, guarding, and burial, there are usually no problems of attribution. It is different with personal objects; compare the “accessories” category in Müller (2010:129). Such items (for example, whistles, tobacco pipes, house keys, [pocket]knives, toys, figurines of saints, and jewelry) originally had a wide variety of functions. In the camps, however, they probably lost these functions for the most part and acquired a new one, that of being a token of an alternate reality, of home, of the past, of normality, even of the future. A comparable transformation must have occurred in the case of objects associated with factory production that were recovered in the camps: these were probably stolen and then repurposed. To this end they were adapted more or less skillfully—often quite professionally—in the workplace where tools were available.

## The Functional Shift

This dimension of a functional change under conditions of bondage and scarcity, namely, on the one hand, unchanged objects charged with new meaning as souvenirs, and, on the other, objects adapted for the purposes of everyday camp life, is a characteristic of Nazi-camp finds that is probably without parallel. It is this phenomenon of a functional “shift” that is described, for example, by Bernbeck (2017:201) as “misappropriation” and then as “affordance.”

It should be borne in mind that many people working under duress crossed a hiatus twice a day, depending on where they were working, between state-of-the-art workplaces of the mid-20th century (marked by a highly condensed work economy and high-tech materials, such as Plexiglas and duralumin, that had only just been developed) and living environments that were often downright archaic in their primitive conditions. Here the most basic necessities were lacking, not only physically vital things, such as spoons, bowls, cups, and funnels to catch water, but also things related to the playing of games, the practice of

<sup>1</sup> *Adressiermaschine*, in English, addressing machine.

**Table 1** Interaction between material and function

| Materials / Functions                | Ceramics                                                       | Glass                                                     | Metal                                                                                                           | Plastic                                                                                          | Other (Wood, Bone, Stone, etc.)                                                |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Building accessories and furnishings | Pipes, sanitary tiles, insulators, electrical                  | Windows, lamps, mirrors, air-shelter door, ink containers | Nails, hooks, supports, holders, installations, furnace parts, handles, binders, hangers, locks, keys, pendants | Lamps, switches, office objects, stencil, extinguisher, rollers                                  | Barrack parts, insulation, coal                                                |
| Food preparation and reception       | Crockery, porcelain, stoneware, <i>adaptations</i>             | Bottles                                                   | Canned food, kitchen- and tableware, cutlery, cups, funnels, sugar cans, <i>adaptations</i>                     | Canteen cups, butter dishes                                                                      | Wooden and bone spoons, <i>adaptations</i>                                     |
| Personal hygiene and medicine        | Pharmacy jars, vessels, dental ceramics                        | Vials, ampules, mirrors, glasses, <i>adaptations</i>      | Shavers, tubes, tins                                                                                            | Glasses, fittings, dentures, combs, toothbrushes, shaving brushes, soap tins, <i>adaptations</i> | Bone spoons                                                                    |
| Clothing, footwear                   | —                                                              | —                                                         | Buttons, badges, uniform parts, shoe sole, boot heel, fittings                                                  | Buttons, badges, shoe sole, <i>adaptations</i>                                                   | Buttons, shoe-leather clogs, <i>adaptations</i>                                |
| Personal items, souvenirs            | Game pieces, carvings of names and symbols, <i>adaptations</i> | Game pieces, jewelry, church mosaic, <i>adaptations</i>   | Boxes and plates with numbers, names and symbols, saxophone, church chalice, <i>adaptations</i>                 | Containers, detonator boxes, souvenirs, <i>adaptations</i>                                       | Game pieces, souvenirs, tobacco pipes, musical instruments, <i>adaptations</i> |
| Manufacturing                        | —                                                              | Shards as cutting and scribing tools, <i>adaptations</i>  | Tools, semifinished products, sheet-metal cuttings, solder wire, <i>adaptations</i>                             | Plexiglass protective goggles, ID cards, <i>adaptations</i>                                      | Sewing tools, accessories, (Schneider-Kreide)                                  |
| Guarding                             | —                                                              | —                                                         | —                                                                                                               | Ammunition, weapons (parts), badges, billets, gas-mask parts                                     | Badges, uniform parts                                                          |
| Burial                               | Urn tags                                                       | —                                                         | Urn lids                                                                                                        | —                                                                                                | Human remains                                                                  |

religion, and the creation of symbols, pictures, and initials that supported the spiritual-emotional survival of a person's identity. These, however, could be made from factory production leftovers. Therefore, subject groups with the occurrence of *adaptations* are highlighted in the table. It even happens that one not only possesses souvenirs “of earlier, of home,” but literally also creates souvenirs of the deprived present, the camp time—possibly to assure oneself of the hope of an end. Table 1 thus shows materials and their functions with a further level of division into original objects of industrial production vs. self-made or adapted objects. There is another level to be considered here, namely, the level of the users, the subjects who used the objects in their function.

### Spheres of Life in Camps

Table 2 builds on Table 1, definitively assigning material remnants (both finds and features), based on their functions, to different spheres of life in the camp along the lines of Carr (2018:539). Here is taken into account that in and across these spheres of life there are also different actors of the camp society, that is, people who exercise agency in relation to the objects (material remnants) as subjects. These people are divided into two groups, the perpetrators (guards/operators) and the victims (prisoners/inmates) (Theune 2015:37; Carr 2018:539). The identification of victims who became perpetrators (kapos, etc.) cannot be made on the basis of the archaeological material, but this transformation should of course be considered. Practically all archaeological phenomena—traces, finds, and features—can be categorized according to four broad types of function that, in turn, are associated with six spheres of life: administration, catering, provisioning, reassurance, exploitation, and dissolution. In all of the spheres of life mentioned, both the perpetrator and victim groups were actively involved or passively affected in very different ways and to different extents; archaeological evidence has been found of the presence of both groups in each of the spheres.

#### *Administration: Infrastructure, Equipment, Guarding, Violence*

This category includes all construction features and finds of building parts and installations, including

killing and incineration facilities (shooting trenches, gas chambers, crematoriums); office equipment, such as files, data carriers, and identity cards and numbers; the guarding complex, consisting of fencing and locks/keys; and the apparatus of violence, including truncheons, weapons and ammunition, and gas-mask remnants. By their very nature, they can all be attributed to the perpetrator community. However, they (apart from the extermination facilities) have an effect on the victim group, especially in the form of the racially graded construction quality and the data collected and used without consent, as well as the forced “allegiance” to the production companies; Carr (2018:539–540, categories 4, 5) calls attention to the fact that many find categories have this effect on both groups of “actors” in the camps.

In their external structure, the forced camps resembled each other (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:58). The areas of the concentration camps, prisoner-of-war camps, and camps for Soviet and Polish civilian forced laborers were fenced in, barracks stood along camp roads, and there were places for assembly and functional buildings, such as camp administration offices and usually a prison. The Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich labor service) made use of various shapes and sizes of barracks that were supplied in more- or less-standardized forms by a wide variety of manufacturers. Often state authorities gave or rented barracks to the companies (Baganz 2009:254). They consequently saw ubiquitous distribution. But, on the other hand, there were major differences: a concentration camp was a heavily guarded place of detention ringed by electrified barbed-wire fencing so that escape was virtually impossible. Camps for Eastern European forced laborers or Italian military internees were also enclosed within barbed-wire fencing (Baganz 2009:251) and guarded, whereas those for Western Europeans were not. Their residents were free to move around the adjacent town or city after work. When several different groups were housed in one camp, internal demarcations (which have been confirmed through archaeological investigation) ensured that the “racial hierarchy” was maintained. Not only did the degree of guarding differ, but so did the type of construction, the furnishings of the barracks, and the number of people housed within specific areas of the camp: racist distinctions being made in accordance with the guidelines of Nazi ideology. Western European and Czech civilian forced laborers and

**Table 2** Functions of material remnants in the camps' spheres of life

|                                                                          | a. Administration:<br>Infrastructure, Equip-<br>ment, Guarding,<br>Violence                                                                               | b. Catering: Rations,<br>Nutrition, Intake, Dis-<br>tribution, Shortage                                               | c. Supply: Clothing,<br>Body Care, Hygiene,<br>Medicine                                                                            | d. Reassurance: Self-<br>Assertion, Identity<br>Protection, Quality of<br>Life, Demonstration                                                                                             | e. Exploitation:<br>Production, Profiteers,<br>Adaptations, Parallel<br>Worlds                              | f. Dissolution: Hope,<br>Liberation, Extinction,<br>Memory                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A. Offender Group<br>Guards, Operators<br>Finds and Structures           | Construction building<br>parts, installations,<br>killing and burn-<br>ing, fence lock, key,<br>office folder, ID card,<br>numbers, weapons,<br>gas masks | Kitchen fixtures and<br>equipment, tableware,<br>porcelain and canteen<br>dishes, animal bones                        | Pharmacy and medicine<br>vessels and equip-<br>ment, uniform and<br>boot parts, fittings,<br>belt gear                             | State symbols, insignia,<br>military/SS insignia,<br>company logos, dem-<br>onstration of group<br>identity, "Volk" and<br>"Gefolgschaft"                                                 | Tool products, signs,<br>badges, manufacturer<br>inscriptions, mass<br>findings, semifi-<br>nished products | Bomb damage, glass<br>melting, leveling lay-<br>ers, garbage pits, ashes                                                       |
| B. Victim Group<br>Inmates, Forced Labor-<br>ers<br>Finds and Structures | Racially graded<br>construction, quality,<br>internal demarcation,<br>ADREMA boards, ID<br>cards, human ashes                                             | Canteens and tinware,<br>cutlery, (including<br>that adapted from<br>factory production<br>remnants), animal<br>bones | Heating and sanitary<br>infrastructure present/<br>missing, medicine,<br>perfume, combs,<br>buttons, toothbrush,<br>soapbox, razor | Inscriptions, name<br>plates, asphalt ini-<br>tials, souvenirs, self-<br>made identity-card<br>covers, hiding places,<br>demonstration of<br>individuality, belong-<br>ing and subversion | Adaptations of high-<br>tech production<br>leftovers for everyday<br>purposes                               | Splinter trenches,<br>symbols of the lib-<br>erators (Soviet star),<br>torn identity cards,<br>souvenirs of the camp<br>period |



**Fig. 4** Stalag badge, Eisenhüttenstadt. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)

prisoners of war were housed slightly more comfortably than Polish prisoners of war and forced laborers. Soviet prisoners of war often had to live in unheated barracks of which the insulation and even the foundations were of poorer quality than those of the barracks for other types of prisoners.

The identification and administration of prisoners in the camps was done by means of numbering. Soviet prisoners of war were given stalag tags (Fig. 4), which were identification tags with a serial number and the identification number of the *Stammlager* (that is, stalag) in which they were first imprisoned. Officially, the Wehrmacht tried to comply with this regulation, at least for the Western European prisoners of war. Soviet soldiers were not always registered, but, when they were, using the number on the tag one can, with a bit of luck, locate the corresponding file card and photo on the Internet on the homepage of MEMORIAL.RU<sup>2</sup> (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:68). Civilian forced laborers were usually registered with an identification number on arrival, but this was not recorded nationally or centrally, or their data were stored by means of the so-called ADREMA boards (Fig. 5).<sup>3</sup> In the concentration camp, the concentration-camp numbers replaced the names of the prisoners, who were thus deprived of their identities.

<sup>2</sup> <<https://memorial.ru/>>.

<sup>3</sup> See the Arolsen Archives Website, <<https://arolsen-archives.org/stories/schicksale-auf-blech/>>.



**Fig. 5** ADREMA (addressing machine) “data carrier,” sheet metal, Treuenbrietzen. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)

Everything was numbered: people, personal effects, barracks, rooms, lockers, beds, etc. Therefore, appropriate stencils, which appear among the find materials, were needed for proper labeling. A look at a photograph of an Arado factory barracks for “western workers” shows an extensive ensemble of objects that can also be found in excavations (Bauer et al. 2004:125): lampshades, earthenware and porcelain bowls and mugs, cooking pots, lids, ashtrays, glass bottles, coat hangers and hooks, locker signs, metal beds, suitcases, and various other items.

The finds from recent archaeological investigations at Nazi forced-labor camps also include weapons and ammunition remnants, as well as other tools and evidence of crimes—including human remains (Theune 2018:24). Excavations in a former concentration camp always take place at a crime scene that is also often a mass grave. In and above the earth are the ash remains, bones, and skeletons of the people who were murdered in the camp. This fact fundamentally distinguishes concentration camps from other forced-labor camps. Other finds also point directly to the bodies and suffering of people, such as bits of dentition from



**Fig. 6** Porcelain dish, Treuenbrietzen. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)



**Fig. 7** Military canteen with a Cyrillic inscription, Luckenwalde. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)

the rubbish pit of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Other direct evidence of crime is shown in the permanent exhibition of the Sachsenhausen memorial: the cartridge drum of a machine gun comes from the Lieberose sub-camp near Jamlitz and is evidence of the shooting of the Jewish concentration-camp inmates when the camp was shut down. The gas-mask rings from the killing center Altes Zuchthaus in Brandenburg an der Havel point directly to the murder of patients—sick people—by poison gas (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:129). The gas masks were worn by those who examined the bodies after the murder and carried them out of the gas chamber. But archaeologists have been confronted with evidence of crimes against humanity in forced-labor camps as well. The truncheon, or club, such as the one found in Falkensee (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:128), is frequently thematized as a symbol of oppression and humiliation in contemporary depictions of prisoners (Morsch and Ley 2016:32, 43), and guards can also be seen posing with it in photographs.

#### *Catering: Nutrition, Intake, Distribution, Deficiency*

The perpetrator group's diet includes such finds as kitchen fixtures and utensils, cutlery, porcelain and canteen crockery, and, occasionally, animal bones, as in Berlin-Tempelhof, for example (Bernbeck 2017:348). In the case of the victim group, the focus is more on deprivation, both of food and of objects for consumption and distribution and serving. This



**Fig. 8** Spoons from different places. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)

is evident in the variety of finds of different crockery (Fig. 6), as well as a canteen and tinware (Fig. 7), and cutlery (Fig. 8), also fabricated out of factory production remnants. Efforts to supplement the diet can be documented in places from the presence of animal bones (Müller 2010:109; Carr 2018:539, category 3).

Many of the archaeological objects found in Nazi forced-labor camps were related to the preparation or consumption of food (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:70). In most camps food was prepared centrally in a kitchen and then distributed to the individual barracks or housing units. Not surprisingly then, large pots and other cooking utensils have been recovered during excavations. Soups were the basis of nutrition in the camps. These could be made in large quantities

with just a few ingredients and diluted with water. It was vital for all camp residents and prisoners to have some object in which the daily food ration could be received, especially cups, plates, regular bowls, or soup bowls. The fact that the camp operators often had to improvise in order to feed large numbers of people is reflected in the large number of different “dishes” found. Canteen crockery can also be found in the camp areas alongside colorful enamelware, aluminum vessels, and partially modified military eating utensils.

Contemporary photos also illustrate this. In barracks in Sachsenhausen, prisoners are eating from porcelain bowls and cooking pots (Morsch and Ley 2016:145), and, in a women’s camp in Brandenburg an der Havel, at least four different kinds of eating bowls can be seen on the tables (Bauer et al. 2004:120). From the visibly brand-new furnishings in a bright, friendly new building, one can see that this situation prevailed right from the start. Containers of all kinds were a kind of life insurance because with them one was able to receive, store, and carry food and drink. For security against theft (and probably also for comfort), they could be placed upside down under the head as a kind of pillow when sleeping, as a photo after the liberation of the small camp in Buchenwald in 1945 shows (Stein 1999:239, figure 244).

All people living in the forced-labor camps were inadequately fed. Depending on the camp and a person’s status—concentration-camp prisoner, prisoner of war, or civilian forced laborer—different food rations were distributed. Distinctions were also made on the basis of a person’s national origin. Nazi racial ideology had an effect here: Western European forced laborers from the Netherlands, for example, who were at the top of the racial hierarchy, received better and more food than the so-called Eastern workers, who themselves received more food than Jewish concentration-camp prisoners and Sinti and Roma, who were at the lower end of the “racial scale.” In some camps prisoners made their own scales to weigh the bread or rations against each other and to compare them; such pieces are missing from the assemblage from Brandenburg State (that is, they have not been found or may have been, but have not been positively identified as such), but several have survived from Buchenwald (Stein 1999:182, figure 169), one possibly made from a wooden clothes hanger. Officially, the rations

were fixed. This says nothing about the actual condition of food in the camps, however. Often low-quality food was provided, food was stretched with fillers, and the regulations concerning the number of calories were not followed. On other days, the food was spoiled or riddled with maggots or worms. It also happened that allotted rations were not distributed to the camp residents, but were embezzled by the camp staff and sold to privileged persons in the camp. The use of low-quality *Freibank* (cheap-counter) meat was included in the official ration prescriptions for “Eastern workers” (Baganz 2009:263), as finds from a camp in Basdorf demonstrate.

In addition to soup as the main food, small amounts of bread and other additions were provided, depending on the camp. In 1943, “performance feeding” was introduced for Eastern workers, Soviet prisoners of war, Italian military internees, and concentration-camp inmates. This meant that food was distributed according to work performance. Those who worked more got more food, and those who worked less got less food. This created a vicious circle in which those who could work only a little, due to illness and weakness, were weakened further, which not infrequently resulted in death by starvation. Hunger was a result of efforts to discipline inmates as well as to cut costs, with deprivation of food being a frequently imposed punishment. Hunger was also a method of murder: in the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp and in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, thousands of prisoners died from malnutrition and its consequences. Soviet prisoners of war in the camps in Luckenwalde and Fürstenberg were also so poorly fed that thousands of them died of hunger.

#### *Supply: Clothing, Body Care, Hygiene, Medicine*

The perpetrator group had access to heated sanitary areas and pharmacy and medical facilities with the typical vessels and equipment, which also found their way into the camp area of the victim group. Significantly, a rare single find of a low-pressure steam boiler at Mahlow was preserved in situ because of its further use there after the war (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:210). The perpetrators owned uniforms and boots, so all kinds of fittings from uniforms and belt gear are found in conditions ranging from new and unused to disarticulated and discarded. The victim group is also defined structurally according to

whether heating and sanitary facilities were available, and, if available, what level of quality characterized them. In those cases where no sanitary facilities existed, however, finds of medicine and perfume bottles are not uncommon. Buttons, combs (new and self-made), toothbrushes, soap tins, and razors, all of which fall under the category 2 of Carr (2018:539), are standard finds.

In all the forced-labor camps, including those for Western European prisoners of war, far too many people lived in a confined space (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:94); there was no privacy. The occupancy of a stalag was regulated by the Wehrmacht: the planned maximum occupancy was 10,000 men, partial camps were to have a capacity of 1,000 people, and 380 people were to be housed in a single barracks with two sleeping rooms and a central washing area. Most prisoners of war remained in the stalag for only a few weeks, after which they were assigned to one of the numerous work *Kommandos* outside the camp and housed there in forced-labor camps, the sizes and degrees of confinement of which varied.

Because of the conditions, diseases spread quickly, and the lack of sanitary facilities greatly increased the risk. In forced-labor camp No. 75/76 in Berlin-Schöneweide, one of the smaller barracks had two toilets and a “pee” wall for 160 men. In the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp, eight toilets for 100 women were originally planned, but the number of women housed in the barracks increased so dramatically over time that by the last weeks before liberation 500 women were crammed into a single barracks. This meant that every day the women had to fight for a place at a washing facility and toilet in an enormous scrum. In provisional camps, such as the one in Below Forest, during the death march of concentration-camp prisoners at the end of the war, or in transitional camps for Soviet prisoners of war, toilets and fresh water were completely lacking.

With little water and hardly any allocation of soap and washing powder, hygiene was predictably a problem in all camps. Within the construct of Nazi social order, cleanliness was seen as a sign of superiority and “German-ness.” In that context, the refusal to give people in the camps the opportunity to clean themselves regularly and thoroughly can also be understood as intentional. Many camp residents felt the enforced uncleanness as a particular humiliation. Another consequence was the vermin infestation:

lice and bedbugs were not only unpleasant, but also transmitted life-threatening diseases. The matter of keeping clean and well groomed was also a matter of staying alive. This was true even for those who did not die directly from one of the diseases, because anyone who fell ill in a forced camp could not work. Yet this was also life threatening for forced laborers under National Socialism. Those who were unable to work were threatened with death: in the concentration camp this was either by the gas chamber or shooting, whereas civilian forced laborers were killed in the context of the “sick killings” at a medical clinic or through neglect leading to death in a sick camp, such as those in Berlin-Blankenfelde or Mahlow.

#### *Reassurance: Identity, Protection, Quality of Life, Demonstration*

Among the group of the perpetrators, military insignia of rank and *Schutzstaffel* (SS) symbols, flags, and state and party emblems were omnipresent. The insignia of the factory owners and company logos could be seen everywhere, right down to the identity cards and work books. Such demonstrations of group identities, in this case of the SS and the Wehrmacht, of the German “people,” and of company “followers,” could not be avoided anywhere by the victim group, except perhaps temporarily in the barracks. For their part, the name inscriptions the members of the victim group made in secret as portable objects (for example, their homemade name plates) and infrastructure (in the form of Cyrillic asphalt initials on the latrine in Eisenhüttenstadt) seem to want to counteract this suppression. Their souvenirs and hiding places are also demonstrations of individuality that signal subversion. At the same time, homemade identity-card covers, for example, can also express the need to belong to the daily working group, even though forced laborers originally had no choice in the matter.

Additional evidence of the demonstration of power includes the frequently encountered horse-shoe-shaped, iron boot heels, the use of which meant that marching troops could be heard from afar. The fear one felt when hearing the sound of boots hitting the pavement is a recurring motif in many accounts by contemporary witnesses. In a possible historical narrative based on acoustic evocation, this sound is contrasted with the clattering of the prisoners’ clogs, which is also reported, and

finally with the noiseless rubber soles of the U.S. troops, which were noted with alienation by German people. In a forced-labor camp, prisoners were part of a mass and were expected to feel that way (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:110). Individuality and self-worth were taken away from them, in part to make resistance more difficult. They were reduced to their working power and had to work for the “German victory.” However, numerous finds from the camps that fall into category 1 of Carr (2018:539) document the will of those imprisoned to assert themselves and remain more than a number. Most striking are objects bearing initials or names. The inscriptions identify possessions, mostly items used in food consumption. These were indispensable, because the longer the war lasted the more difficult it was to obtain even the simplest everyday items in a camp, such as cups and mugs. At the same time, being able to read one’s own name also strengthens one’s identity.

Possession of something, however minimal, gave prisoners a little space for self-expression. Furthermore, making things that were needed eliminated scarcity. For example, one could comb one’s hair and remove lice with a self-made comb. Self-made things could also be given as gifts and thus bring joy to someone else and strengthen a human relationship. Solidarity and friendship between prisoners in and of themselves were modes of resistance in a concentration camp (Bernbeck 2017:204) as the camp administration set out to control the prisoners by inciting competition among them and playing different groups off against each other. Friendships were also crucial for the survival of prisoners of war and forced laborers.

At the same time, self-made things were objects of exchange. Outside the camps, people traded woven baskets or other “handicrafts” they had made for food (Hirte 1999:40). To make things, camp residents and prisoners resorted to what they had: wood taken from bed frames, paper or straw from the bed sacks that served as mattresses, or colorful toothbrush handles that were used to make many miniatures in the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp, for example (Beßmann and Eschebach 2013:161). Factory production leftovers or materials from the workplace were also used for self-made things (Figs. 9 and 10). Stealing and processing these materials was risky, as



**Fig. 9** Self-made knife of wood, iron, and aluminum, Rathenow. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)



**Fig. 10** Self-made funnel of sheet metal, Treuenbrietzen. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)

such actions could be considered sabotage and thus punishable by death.

Another way to assert oneself in the camp was to decorate things or make objects of beauty. Both set the camp existence against the memory of a better world. Culture, most often in the form of music; education; and religion could also strengthen prisoners’ sense of self. Engaging in cultural activities was forbidden in the concentration camp, but was nevertheless sometimes tolerated. Secret lectures, school lessons for younger prisoners and children, musical evenings with singing or even instruments stolen from the personal-effects room not only passed the time, but demonstrated to the prisoners that life existed beyond the camp. Religious services were also celebrated in the concentration camps (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:122). Communal and individual

acts of faith could support prisoners and forcibly displaced people's will to live.

According to the Geneva Convention, prisoners of war were entitled to pastoral care and cultural activities, which did not cover Jewish prisoners of war and Soviet soldiers, however. Consequently, British, French, and American prisoners of war were allowed to set up chapels in their barracks and celebrate religious services. For example, in Stalag III B in Fürstenberg there was one chapel for French and one for American prisoners of war. The Americans' chapel was located in a barrack with a lending library, a theater room, and an athletic-training room as well. The prisoners made the furnishings (and a mosaic, as found in Eisenhüttenstadt) mainly out of rubbish. The better treatment of Western prisoners of war compared to that of Soviet prisoners of war must be acknowledged, but that should not lead to the evaluation of their captivity as "less bad." Western prisoners of war were also completely subject to the arbitrariness of the Nazi regime.

#### *Exploitation: Production, Profiteers, Adaptations, and Parallel Worlds*

The finds associated with the group of perpetrators and profiteers include things that are directly related to factory production, such as factory-made tools and industrial products or parts. Large numbers of these types of artifacts were recovered during investigations recently carried out at two sites, the Dreilinden plant in Kleinmachnow (Antkowiak 2020) and the Arado plant in Rathenow (Bartels 2022). In addition, there are signs, identity cards, manufacturers' inscriptions, and mass finds of semifinished products from Ravensbrück and elsewhere. The victims' group, in this context, are above all associated with adaptations of remnants of the most technologically advanced materials (taken from the factories) for everyday purposes in their often-primitive archaic environment, a world parallel to the modern industrial workplace of the 20th century. It was precisely the use of numerous unskilled workers that forced the factories to rationalize, thereby contributing to the modernization of German industry as a whole and to the "economic miracle" after the war (Bräutigam 2003:28).

Many things recovered from the sites of forced-labor camps point to profiteers (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:124). First of all, this group included the

companies that used forced laborers. Forced-labor camps were usually located in the immediate vicinity of factory production sites and, with the increasing relocation of armament production, in the Berlin environs. The manufacturers' names on canteen crockery and cutlery are a reminder of the profit the companies made from forced labor and of their responsibility for the treatment of the forced laborers (Bernbeck 2017:150). But those who built and supplied the camps also profited. The provision of beds, crockery, water-supply and sewage pipes, administration and rental of barracks, and the construction and operation of camps formed a business in and of itself. In the course of the war, the worsening labor shortage caused German industry and the state to rely on forced labor more and more. In addition to prisoners of war and deported civilians, concentration-camp prisoners were also used as the last reserve of labor. Concentration-camp satellite camps were either built adjacent to the forced-labor camps at armament-production and large construction sites, or the companies built their production facilities directly next to the concentration camps, as Siemens and Halske did with the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück. Ultimately, however, the entire German population profited from the exploitation of the people in the camps. Forced labor produced not only armaments essential to the war effort, but also food and consumer goods for the Wehrmacht and the civilian population. There was no area of work in which forced labor was not used. Without it, the war could not have been fought for so long. Moreover, without forced labor and the plundering of the occupied territories, it would not have been possible to provide for the German population during the war.

The everyday objects associated with the German camp administration and the German workers found at the camp sites show that forced labor and "normal" working conditions existed side by side. The finds indicate that the "Germans" were better provided for, but also show that the forced laborers were not segregated from German workers. The archaeological findings cannot speak to how the colleagues, administrators, and guards behaved toward the camp residents and prisoners. Here the statements of contemporary witnesses must be relied on, and these report a wide range of behavior. In addition to isolated acts of compassion and humanity, there are reports of violence, assaults, and degrading treatment, even on a small



**Fig. 11** Self-made Soviet symbol of sheet metal, Rathenow. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)

scale. The vast majority of Germans, workers and population, however, were simply indifferent to the suffering of the forced laborers and concentration-camp inmates.

#### *Dissolution: Hope, Liberation, Destruction, Remembrance*

As the war was coming to an end, both the perpetrator and the victim groups were affected by airplane bombing, of which the archaeological traces are the debris and remnants left behind, such as molten glass. For the victim group, mostly sliver trenches, which were completely inadequate, were provided as protection; these have been archaeologically investigated to some extent. Self-made symbols of the liberators, such as Soviet stars and a flag lace with a hammer-and-sickle motif testify to the hope of liberation



**Fig. 12** Self-made souvenir of Plexiglas, Füssenberg. (Photo by Friedhelm Hoffmann, 2019.)

(Fig. 11); torn factory ID cards from Rathenow may document the relief at liberation. Many prisoners took home souvenirs from the camp period, often to be given later to the memorials at the camp site; other souvenirs were left behind, such as the SOUVENIR DE MA CAPTIVITÉ made of Plexiglas by a French prisoner of war in Luckenwalde (Fig. 12). There are striking parallels to the symbols of hope among finds from German internment camps on the British Channel Islands, in which the “V” plays a role as the “victory sign,” whether carved, painted on, woven in, or cut out, to give some examples (Carr 2010).

Concentration-camp prisoners, prisoners of war, and forced laborers waited eagerly for liberation and hoped to experience it (Haubold-Stolle et al. 2020:150). But bomb fragments, ammunition remnants, and glass and metal melted by fires bear witness to the violence that accompanied the liberation of the camps. Nazi forced-labor camps that were built next to armament production sites and all camps that were located in Berlin became intentional or unintentional targets of Allied bombing. The Battle of Berlin, fought district by district and street by street, also endangered the people in the camps. On the one hand, the air raids gave hope to the people in the camps that the Germans would be defeated and they would be liberated. On the other, they feared the bombs because there was hardly any protection from them. If there were any shelters at all, they were splinter shelters, the construction of which was so poor that they could really only protect those inside from bomb splinters. A direct hit by a bomb was another matter.

Eastern European and Jewish forced laborers were not allowed to use other air-raid shelters. To protect the camps from fires caused by the air attacks, an order was issued in August 1943 that barracks be built out of solid stone (Baganz 2009:258). A few of them are still standing in Brandenburg (Falkensee).

But it was not only the effects of the war that made the last weeks and months of the war the most life threatening for concentration-camp prisoners and camp residents. The terror campaign of the Nazi regime also intensified once again. The Sachsenhausen concentration camp was evacuated as the Allied armies approached, with those unable to march being murdered in advance and those able to do so being driven out of the camps on foot. Many of them died from the hardships of the journey or were shot or beaten to death. The “death march” of the Sachsenhausen concentration-camp prisoners has been attested to by finds of personal items along the route. At the site of a makeshift camp in the Below Forest, traces of the prisoners can still be seen on trees (in the form of carvings and rubbings) and in the ground; the artifacts recovered from the site are housed in the museum there. Forced laborers, too, fell victim to crimes in the final phase of the war, such as the 127 Italian military internees who were shot near Treuenbrietzen in April 1945. These were forced laborers from a camp where archaeologists have recovered items of Italian origin, such as coins.

Shortly before the end of the war, the guards and administration left the camps. The inmates mostly remained in the camps until they returned home or were taken to camps for displaced persons. The barracks and the camps were frequently used by the Allied armies in the first months after the war. The objects that the Allies, mainly American and Soviet soldiers, brought from their homelands have been recovered at camp sites, mainly in Berlin and Brandenburg. From the summer of 1945 on, as part of the denazification policy, the Soviets set up special camps on a portion of the Sachsenhausen site and in several other places in which men and women suspected of supporting the Nazi regime were imprisoned. However, people who were considered a danger to the establishment of the new communist social order were also interned—with the finds of this period being of the same types as those from the previous period, such a comb with the carving: Sachsenhausen 1945/46.

Other camps continued to be used for housing people, especially those who had been liberated as well as those who had been bombed out, refugees, and displaced persons from the German eastern territories. The leveling layers, rubbish pits, and ash pits often owe their existence to the desire to erase the camps from memory as quickly as possible after their liberation. Other camps were demolished, and entire barracks or the building materials were reused in other places. Due to their serial construction they were often dismantled, moved, and repurposed, even in private gardens, for example, in Mahlow. With most of the camps being demolished over time, they disappeared from the view of the German population; their burning, dismantling, and leveling also fulfilled the function of a “*damnatio memoriae*” (condemnation of memory): the camps were to disappear as a reminder of the crimes committed there (Doßmann et al. 2007:239). Only at the sites of the two largest concentration camps, in Fürstenberg and Oranienburg, were memorial sites established, in 1958 and 1961. Many smaller sites of terror thus fell into oblivion. Even large camps, such as the prisoner-of-war camps Stalag III A in Luckenwalde and Stalag III B in Eisenhüttenstadt, completely disappeared from memory. Only in the last three decades have they been rediscovered through civic engagement and brought back into the public consciousness with the help of archaeology (Schute 2017:3).

### Free at Last? Repatriates in the Red Army’s Forest Camps

Seventy years after the end of World War II, previously unnoticed traces of the conflict attracted attention in the forests of Brandenburg State. These were groups of rectangular pits lined up along paths with military precision, often in several rows, by the dozens and even hundreds. In 2014 they were recognized as the remnants of blockhouses, in Russian, *zemlyanki* (earth house, shelters), from 1945 that were constructed shortly after the capitulation of the Third Reich. There archaeologists have recovered a wide range of artifacts related to the everyday life of the Red Army soldiers: pieces of equipment, insignia, eating utensils, military field bottles, and cutlery. Some objects bear Cyrillic inscriptions. Carved Soviet stars on Wehrmacht belt locks above the



**Fig. 13** Self-made aluminum box with a Cyrillic inscription, Bensdorf. (Photo by Doris Sommer, 2015.)

deliberately erased swastika, for example, reflect the pronounced need to adorn oneself with the symbol of victory. Civilian material—jewelry, watches, lighters, razors, and even water taps and bicycle parts—confirms the specific narratives of the time. Among the finds, objects that are also known from Nazi forced-labor camps stand out, such as homemade boxes fashioned from aircraft aluminum and decorated with carved inscriptions. These, such as the tin box made of aircraft aluminum decorated with the Cyrillic lettering: *IAHOΦEP* (HANOVER) (Fig. 13), seem to attest to the presence of liberated former prisoners of war and forced laborers. These pieces were so important to the people concerned, both functionally and certainly as souvenirs, that the people brought the items with them when they left the camps upon liberation, as can be seen in contemporary photos.

After the liberation of those held in the camps just before the war ended, hundreds of thousands made their way home in tandem with the advance of the Allies in the west and east. Those who wanted to go east crossed the Elbe in northern Brandenburg State and came under the control of the Soviet Army, which immediately integrated conscripts and placed them in the forest camps. These camps were probably used to organize the return transport of the “repatriates,” who did not have an easy fate at home, as they were often defamed as collaborators and even traitors, a double suffering and injustice that was mostly kept quiet by

the repatriates as well as the historians (Bräutigam 2003:51). These connections, which are certainly not yet more widely known even among historians due to a lack of accessible sources, are now becoming visible on the basis of archaeological, material sources, and their evaluation is only just beginning (Kersting, Unglaub et al. 2016; Bernbeck et al. 2018).

## Conclusion

A statewide recording of camp sites with low resolution is an everyday task of the state archaeology office. However, the study of all the sites the state protects is by no means one of the tasks (and interests) of state archaeology, and certainly the undertaking of excavations is not—as one hears time and again, even from university colleagues. No, it is about primary protection *in situ*! Nevertheless, there is already enough rescue excavation done to collect masses of finds and features, which allows insights and is worth being presented here.

As has been seen, many features and finds are encountered “ubiquitously,” while others manifest as unique. Material remnants characterize groups of people rather than “camp types.” These people are those who were exposed to racist ideology, military conventions, economic interests, and political dictates: first and foremost Soviet prisoners of war and “Eastern workers.” Instead of a “typology of camps,” the identification of groups of people is the main result of these archaeological investigations.

The “space-based models” created by history and sociology for the camps—as Agamben (2002), Arendt (1986), and Foucault (1977) argue, each pursuing different lines of thinking, in the senses of defense space, power space, and exception space (Schwarte 2007:174)—are all concerned with the effect of the “institution camp” on people and their minds. These models do not ask about materiality because they emerge out of a completely different approach than that of archaeology. It now turns out, however, that through the analysis of materiality explored by archaeology, individual people appear again: as single users (often anonymous, sometimes concrete) of the objects on the one hand, and, on the other, as groups of people who can be definitively depicted. In addition, through the materiality of the camps, both the victims and the perpetrators are

identified as actors, while in the sociological models only the victims' perspectives are considered.

Theoretical models also take lesser account of the variety of camp types because they are based on a fictitious ideal type, for example, Sofsky (1997). Understandably, the extermination camps were foremost in the minds of sociologists when they formulated their models, and they did not yet have an eye for the multitude of gradations. However, the examination of the camps' materiality proves that the well-known organizational variety of camp types not only existed simultaneously and side by side, but even existed in one and the same place, in the same camp location—and were related to the racist ranking of different groups of people. The key group of people recognizable in the camps of Brandenburg State are the Soviet prisoners of war, who become visible through features and finds because their position at the bottom of the racial ranking meant they were subject to treatment associated with specific material measures. Interestingly, Jewish victims are practically not “visible” in the archaeological material from the camps in Brandenburg State, but this is of course because they were primarily Germans (Kersting 2022).

Thus, the “institution camp” cannot be described using the uncritical implementation of certain prefabricated “typologies.” When these typologies proved to be less practicable, other solutions were found, up to and including the fact that pure extermination institutions from the so-called Aktion Reinhardt were built “without camps” (Berger 2013) in the east of Poland. The aim was to have flexibility in the housing, guarding, and exploitation of groups of people who were clearly differentiated in the racial hierarchy, whether in prisoner-of-war camps, concentration camps, satellite camps, or forced-labor camps, especially as these camp types increasingly merged. Criminal efficiency marked by a high degree of flexibility in how the intention of extermination was realized becomes provable here—even by archaeological means.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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