

## REVIEWS AND SHORT REVIEW NOTES

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(Review) Alexandra Staniewska and Ewa Domańska (eds), *Ekshumacje polityczne: teoria i praktyka*. Lubin 2023: Muzeum Historyczne w Lubinie, Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 728 pages, ISBN: 978-83-7453-521-2.

Exhumations, understood as the act of retrieving human remains from the ground, are of interest to fields such as law, medicine, and archaeology. They are commonly perceived as individual acts, often performed at the request of the family or due to investigative needs in criminal cases. However, there are instances where exhumations become mass events, particularly in historical contexts involving human rights violations.

On occasion, exhumations take on a political nature. Politics – that is, matters of the state, public affairs. It is not without reason that Francisco Ferrándiz, one of the book's contributors, refers to the concept of the 'political life of dead bodies', a kind of life after life. In this context, the protection of individual rights seems to gain deeper significance, raising justified concerns among many researchers. Alexandra Staniewska and Ewa Domańska have tackled this very subject, creating a monumental work. 'Ekshumacje polityczne' is a compilation of texts by various authors: anthropologists, literary historians, archaeologists, and geographers. Such a broad approach to the issue undoubtedly allows for examining political exhumations from various perspectives.

The starting point for creating 'Ekshumacje polityczne' was the concept of the so-called forensic turn: a methodology whereby human remains, as witnesses to past events, can be analyzed within a broad social, cultural, and historical perspective. This approach, where 'bones don't lie' assigns a new kind of subjectivity to remains, compelling researchers to go beyond the confines of their own disciplines and adopt a comprehensive view on the issues related to exhumations.

It is not without reason that Ewa Domańska, in the 'Final Remarks' of the publication, advocates for the creation of a new, hybrid research method, treating 'bones as method'

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(p. 581). The author emphasizes the necessity for new research: innovative and transdisciplinary, proposing a sort of marriage between the humanities and the sciences. This hybridity in the context of research on human remains gains new significance here, and the nature of 'Ekshumacje polityczne' undoubtedly proves the validity of such an approach.

The publication is divided into three parts: 'Theories, Methods, Research Approaches,' 'Global Perspective,' and 'Local Perspective.'

The theoretical section opens with Élisabeth Anstett's text on the concept of the mass grave. Anstett highlights a linguistic problem: the word 'burial' implies a certain voluntariness in the interment of bodies, which is problematic in the context of mass crimes. In response, Anstett proposes creating a new term that emphasises intentionality rather than voluntariness. Erin Jessee and Mark Skinner also suggest new definitions, noting that 'mass graves' are understood differently by archaeologists, humanitarian workers, and lawyers. To help readers understand these proposed changes, the authors introduce clear graphical distinctions in their article. This methodological section is particularly important for 'Ekshumacje polityczne' because it is difficult to advocate for a new research method without standardising the terminology.

Other interesting articles in this context include studies on the necrosols of selected cemeteries in the Land of the Great Masurian Lakes (L. Majgier and O. Rahmonov) and an overview of global research on the impact of cemeteries on groundwater chemistry (J. Żychowski). Although seemingly unrelated to the overall theme, these articles introduce another perspective, emphasising the necessity of considering human remains as a subject of study in themselves.

The theoretical section concludes with articles on the cultural conditions of handling human remains from excavations (Z. Kobyliński) and the ethics of archaeology (A. González-Ruibal), which appropriately correspond with each other. Zbigniew Kobyliński points out that in Poland, the issue of handling human remains from excavations has not been adequately addressed. He also notes that while archaeological excavations can significantly contribute to scientific knowledge, they often conflict with the rights of various minorities, particularly regarding their beliefs.

A potential barrier to presenting 'Ekshumacje polityczne' to a broader audience is the specialized language of the publication. However, Staniewska and Domańska have organized the anthology in an orderly manner. After thoroughly introducing readers to the theoretical issues, the second part of the book addresses the global perspective of political exhumations. It is unclear why the chapter opens with a preface to the book 'Forensic Archaeology: A Global Perspective' (C. C. Snow), as this article might have been better suited for the theoretical section.

Francisco Ferrándiz's text is particularly moving, discussing the 'social autopsy of the exhumation of mass graves in Spain.' It addresses the handling of bodies of civil war victims, depending on whether they fought on the winning or losing side. Ferrándiz highlights the associated violence, noting that 'in the case of mass burials resulting from war,

the deliberate mingling of anonymous bodies in unmarked graves has the potential to seep disorder, fear, and division into the social fabric' (p. 273). He also asserts that contemporary exhumations are crucial for recovering historical memory.

Sarah Wagner's article offers an intriguing perspective, questioning how the saying 'bones don't lie, and graves tell stories' applies to incomplete remains that cannot fully convey a narrative. Wagner analyzes two cases: remains from a mass grave in Srebrenica and remains of American soldiers killed during the Korean War. Élisabeth Anstett's subsequent article focuses on the victims of Soviet Gulags. In this case, remains are rarely incomplete, but families often have no knowledge of the burial sites due to the Soviet state's systematic confiscation of bodies. Anstett explores the practices of erasing traces and their effects, highlighting the state of deferred mourning (p. 330) experienced by the victims' relatives.

Małgorzata Wosińska's article on commemorating human remains as an emancipatory strategy compares the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust. Wosińska, an anthropologist, writes from her own experiences and fieldwork. She refers to a "turning point" in her research when the Rwandan government, despite comparing the Tutsi genocide to the Holocaust, rejected assistance from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum (p. 337). She analyzes the presentation of exhibits at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre and the controversial display in Murambi, which treats human remains as museum objects. Although the title suggests a comparison with the Holocaust, the author focuses primarily on Rwanda, leaving its contextualisation to future authors.

Dorotheé Delacroix's article, 'Etnografia uciszanej przemocy. Ku antropologii życia pośmiertnego zamordowanych i zaginionych w Peru', discusses the discrepancy between officially accepted local memory, in line with political and legal norms, and the cultural element of widespread 'ghost sightings' of conflict victims. Delacroix also examines the impact of mass deaths on people's imaginations, questioning whether this phenomenon results from trauma or serves as an interpretative category for experiencing violence. Her conclusions are supported by an extensive bibliography and interviews with those experiencing the phenomenon.

Anne Yvonne Guillou's article on the status of bodies after the Khmer Rouge genocide closes the global perspective section. Guillou attempts to understand Cambodian society post-genocide, emphasizing the importance of interpreting the remaining traces of war, including the status of the victims. She highlights that until the 1991 peace agreements, human remains were treated not only as evidence but also as a symbolic foundation for the new order. The signing of the peace agreements halted exhumation efforts until 2007, with official documents making no mention of the recent genocide. This article underscores the need for local perspective research.

The local perspective section opens with Caroline Sturdy Colls' text on Holocaust archaeology and the study of Nazi persecution sites. This article deserves special attention not only for its subject matter but also because it serves as a kind of manual for researchers.

Colls analyzes various approaches used in Holocaust landscape studies and proposes a new methodology incorporating contemporary archaeological and forensic advances, with an emphasis on non-invasive methods. This article provides practical guidance for archaeologists, aiding in the selection of appropriate research methods.

Andrzej Kola's work, 'Zbrodnia katyńska w świetle prac archeologiczno-ekshumacyjnych' reports on exploratory work in the Kharkiv and Bykivnia areas. A similar structure characterizes Krzysztof Persak's article on the Jedwabne exhumations in Poland. Both exhumations share common points, such as significant limitations on the scope of work and attempts to draw conclusions from incomplete evidence. In the case of the Katyń massacre, this resulted from the USSR's (and later Russia's) reluctance to conduct extensive extraction-archaeological operations. This situation is somewhat analogous to that described in Élisabeth Anstett's text on Gulag victims. The Jedwabne exhumations were limited due to restrictions imposed by Halacha, Jewish religious law. Nevertheless, Persak's article seems crucial, especially given the ongoing public controversy surrounding the events in Jedwabne.

Milena Bykowska's work, 'Zdjęcia lotnicze i materiał DNA w procesie identyfikacji skazanych na karę śmierci i rozstrzelanych w Polsce w latach 1944-1956. Zarys problematyki' leaves the reader somewhat unsatisfied. Bykowska discusses the individual approach to identifying the fallen, describing her experience with the first large-scale DNA comparison studies of the missing and their families, conducted during work at the 'Łączka' ('Meadow') site under the modern graves of the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw. However, she only briefly touches on a controversial topic related to this case: a 2016 amendment to the IPN Act, which allows exhumation work in cemeteries without first obtaining the consent of families of those later buried on top of the sites where victims of repressions in the Stalinist period lie. Although this does not detract from Bykowska's work, it would have enriched both her article and the entire publication.

An interesting editorial choice is the inclusion of information on the results of the exhumation of remains of victims of the 2010 Smolensk airplane crash, released by the National Prosecutor's Office on April 10, 2020. This seems like an almost readable prelude to Marcin Napiórkowski's article on mourning ceremonies as tools of legitimization and delegitimization of power. This information was published exactly 10 years after the accident, when Tupolev Tu-154 aircraft operating Polish Air Force Flight 101 crashed in Russia, killing all 96 people on board, including the Polish presidential couple. Napiórkowski's text also opens the final (though informal) literary section of 'Ekshumacje polityczne'. Napiórkowski, a literary historian, emphasizes his interest in 'not only what is remembered but also how it is remembered' (p. 535). Referring to national mourning, he analyzes past events in Poland, such as the collective memory in Poland following the deaths of Pope John Paul II, the Smolensk disaster, the funeral of Józef Piłsudski, and even Stanisław Staszic.

Just as Napiórkowski's text discusses the creation of narratives, Paweł Tomczok's article on Przemysław Dakowicz's 'necropatriotism' analyzes the work of the Nowy Sącz poet, whose writings largely concern the 'cursed soldiers', that is people who attempted to oppose the rise of communist power in Poland through underground military action. Although Dakowicz's poems are about the deceased, Tomczok notes that it is death that makes their lives significant, and the fate of the bodies themselves creates a narrative. This 'necropatriotism' becomes a pretext for telling stories about a lost world, meant to be remembered by the victims of the communist regime.

'Past events are of interest only when they matter for the present or future' (p. 245), writes Alfredo González-Ruibal in his article on the ethics of archaeology. In the case of exhumations, both the historical context and the contemporary fate of the remains are crucial. 'Ekshumacje polityczne' challenges the Polish legal principle that grants personhood only until death. By questioning the fate of the bodies, the book highlights their narrative agency, demonstrating that remains are often used to create new layers of history.

