

# RESISTANCE – DEATH – SURVIVAL

**The Archaeological Excavations of the  
Gusen Concentration Camp**

Edited by: Claudia Theune, Karina Grömer, Andrea Wahl

# IMPRINT

**Bewusstseinsregion Mauthausen–Gusen–St. Georgen**

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# FOREWORD

Ladies and Gentlemen, this exhibition is a good example of the interesting results that can be achieved at the end of a project when people from different organisations with a wide variety of approaches, different areas of expertise, with dedication, ideas, creativity and professionalism, tackle a task and work together.

The topic is particularly significant for the region. It brings important insights and interconnections to light, especially regarding the misuse of archaeology. With its compelling methodological and educational design, it appeals to the senses and to visitors of all generations and backgrounds.

Through intensified cooperation within the Erasmus+ project, the exhibition has gained international significance. We are able to present four display cases showing objects which concentration camp detainees held in their hands. This is supported by an exhibition catalogue, by text displays, by portraits of four remarkable personalities, in short film form and an educational framework with educators facilitating guided tours and workshops.

We thank everyone who has worked on this project, who supported it and made it financially possible.



**Thomas Punkenhofer**

Mayor of the market town  
of Mauthausen  
Chairman of the Mauthausen-Gusen-  
St. Georgen Region of Awareness  
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I am very proud and grateful that the initiative for this exhibition came largely from Christoph Freudenthaler, who was chairman of the Johann Gruber Platform for many years. He initiated and implemented numerous projects on and about the resistance fighter Johann Gruber, supported his rehabilitation and helped to ensure that he would receive the recognition he deserved.

I am particularly pleased that this exhibition, 'Resistance - Death - Survival: The

Archaeological Excavations of the Gusen Concentration Camp,' can be shown at the House of Remembrance in St. Georgen an der Gusen. This marks an important milestone for memorial work in the region and beyond. Correspondingly, you are holding the catalogue in your hands. The exhibition enables schoolchildren from the 3rd grade onwards to engage with issues relevant to the topic. I would like to thank everyone, especially the volunteers for their contributions, ideas and research, making this interesting exhibition possible.

This exhibition showcases a piece of Langenstein's local history. During construction of railway tracks, detainees discovered a prehistoric cemetery containing approximately 200 graves.

The so-called "Spielberg Commando" was involved in archaeological excavations and began its work with the uncovering and securing of Spielberg Castle. I am particularly pleased that this exhibition has prompted the Friends of the Spielberg Castle

Association, led by Ernst Mittmannsgruber and Robert Hofstadler, to engage so intensively in the research of local history. I would like to express my sincere thanks to them, as well as to all the commemorative initiatives involved, the Mauthausen-Gusen Memorial and the technical expertise and support provided by the Natural History Museum Vienna (Karina Grömer), the University of Vienna (Claudia Theune) and the Federal Monuments Authority Austria (Eva Steigberger).



**Andreas Derntl**

Mayor of the market town  
of St. Georgen an der Gusen  
© Christine Ruhsam



**Christian Aufreiter**

Mayor of the municipality Langenstein  
© Werbeagentur Online

# FOREWORD

In 2020, renowned artist Christian Kosmas Mayer created the art project 'Wetterleuchten am Horizont' (Lightning on the Horizon) in memory of priest and educator Dr. Johann Gruber in the entrance area of the University of Education of the Diocese of Linz. During his research, he discovered artefacts from archaeological excavations at the Gusen concentration camp, which had been stored away from public view for many decades in the underground storage facilities of the Natural History Museum Vienna (NHM).

This art project gave the initial impetus for the exhibition 'Resistance - Death - Survival. On the Archaeological Excavations of the Gusen Concentration Camp' in St. Georgen an der Gusen. Inspired by this, the 'Plattform Johann Gruber', a regional memorial initiative in St. Georgen, organised an excursion to the Natural History Museum Vienna, where the idea of an exhibition at the site of the excavations was born. Under the leadership of the 'Mauthausen - Gusen - St. Georgen Region of Awareness', an eminently constructive collaboration developed between regional experts and representatives of the Natural History Museum Vienna, the University of Vienna, the Federal Monuments Authority Austria and the Mauthausen Memorial. The exhibition in the 'House of Remembrance' in St. Georgen an der Gusen and the exhibition catalogue at hand are the result of this dynamic development. The publication elucidates the

profound implications of the finds from Gusen for the discipline of archaeology, highlights the ideological exploitation of archaeology by the National Socialist regime, and offers insights into the context of excavations at the Gusen concentration camp and at Spilberg Castle.

Our particular gratitude is extended to Karina Grömer, who, on behalf of the Natural History Museum Vienna, drove the exhibition project forward with great enthusiasm, to Claudia Theune of the University of Vienna for her scientific expertise, to the Federal Monuments Authority Austria, the Polish Embassy in the Republic of Austria, the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw, to Rudolf Haunschmied for his research into the significance of Polish prisoners in the context of the Gusen excavations by reviewing Polish literature, the Mauthausen Memorial, and finally to the two local historians Robert Hofstadler and Ernst Mittmannsgruber, who through tireless research incorporated their knowledge of the excavation context of Spilberg Castle into the exhibition concept. We extend our gratitude to everyone who contributed to the creation of the exhibition, especially the authors of this exhibition catalogue. Last but not least, we thank each and every sponsor, in particular the Natural History Museum Vienna, who made this exhibition possible in the first place.

May the exhibition 'Resistance - Death - Survival. On the Archaeological Excavations of the Gusen Concentration Camp. contribute

to a raising of public awareness of the harrowing events that took place in the Gusen concentration camp during the Nazi era, and may what happened there - also under the guise of archaeology as discipline - never happen again.



**Christoph Freudenthaler**

Honorary Chairman of the  
Johann Gruber Platform  
© Dedl W.



**Andrea Wahl**

Managing Director of the Mauthausen -  
Gusen - St. Georgen Region of Awareness  
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The first time I heard about this almost unbelievable story of a smuggling from Gusen in the service of humanity was from Anton Kern, the late director of the Prehistoric Department of the Natural History Museum Vienna. He told me about Johann Gruber, who as a camp detainee forced into archaeological labour, managed to transport money and letters inside of archaeological finds. The finds from the 'Gusen concentration camp excavations' are preserved in the Natural History Museum Vienna. Anton Kern had already compiled information and exhibits for the Memorial back in 2020, because the topic was so important to him.

I am therefore all the more pleased that the current director of the department, Karina Grömer, is also taking this issue so seriously and placing it in the broader context of reappraising the history of archaeology as discipline. She and other collection managers at the Natural History Museum Vienna are very actively addressing the issue of reappraising contexts of injustice.

It is important that our society continues to address the legacy of National Socialism and reflect on how it came to be that people were so massively excluded from community that there was hardly any resistance to their disenfranchisement and murder.

Despite the fact that this commemoration is observed in various groups, it doesn't seem to have entered the collective consciousness of how damaging the current exclusionary and populist discourses of 'Us and Them' are in this respect. 'Normal and abnormal'. One part of an Austrian population 'belonging by descent', as opposed to 'those to be remigrated' [meaning: immigrants], because they supposedly undermine 'cultural identity' through 'population exchange'.

The language used sets the scene: when words such as "Schuld kult" ['cult of guilt'] are being used, activities such as those of the Gusen Memorial and others must counter that. Irrespective of the fact that there are reasons for the sovereignty of nation states, marginalisation begins in the mind, in language, in attributions. I am therefore very pleased that this partnership between the Gusen Memorial and the Mauthausen Memorial, the Region of Awareness and the Natural History Museum Vienna, in particular the Department of Prehistory, has been working so diligently on this legacy while creating space for forward-looking discourse. I would like to thank everyone involved and hope that it will lead to greater sensitivity in our dealings with each other as people in Austria, Europe and other regions of the world.



**Katrin Vohland**

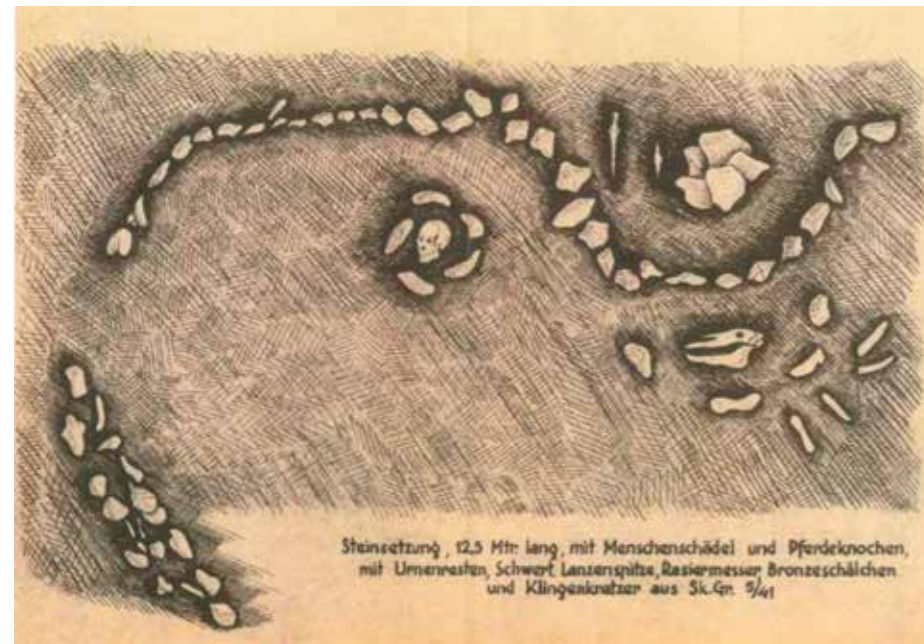
Director General of the  
Natural History Museum Vienna  
© A. Schumann, NHM Wien

# ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

## Concept and contents of the display cases

A former concentration camp and the discipline of archaeology – a combination that may not immediately be obvious. The Mauthausen-Gusen camp complex plays a special role here – on the one hand, because research into the events at the camps in recent decades has also used archaeological methods to excavate and analyse the material world of the camp detainees in Mauthausen. On the other

hand, this exhibition was also created against the backdrop of the discovery of a Late Bronze Age cemetery (time of use from approximately 1400 to 1100 BC) on the grounds of the Gusen concentration camp in the 1940s. The excavations and documentation were co-organised and carried out by detainees of the camp under the supervision of the predecessor of today's Federal Monuments Authority Austria.



Steinsetzung, 12,5 Mtr. lang, mit Menschenschädel und Pferdeknöchel, mit Urnenresten, Schwert Lanzenspitze, Rasiermesser Bronzeschälchen und Klingensatz aus Sk.Gr. 5/41

Karina Grömer and Barbara Hirsch

The exhibition thus connects different periods and levels of significance relating to the Gusen concentration camp and the archaeological remains found there with the protagonists involved.

The first step in designing any exhibition is choosing the theme and developing the narrative that will be told, depending on the target audience. Next, objects are selected based on available space, infrastructure (display cases, security, etc.) and budget. An educational programme must also be included in the planning from the outset.

### Conception

Four large display cases dominate the exhibition space. Arranged in star shape, the themes presented in each relate to one another: (1) the Late Bronze Age cemetery represents archaeology as discipline, (2) the concentration camp and its contexts, (3) a view of the Late Bronze Age in the Nazi context, and (4) Spilberg Castle. Text displays and images on corresponding walls provide further information and invite visitors to delve deeper into the topics. Complementing film material embeds the themes in contemporary history.

Fig. 1 Stone setting at grave 5/1941  
© Federal Monuments Authority Austria, Department of Archaeology, Mauerbach, provincial files archive (Ortsakten) Langenstein-Gusen

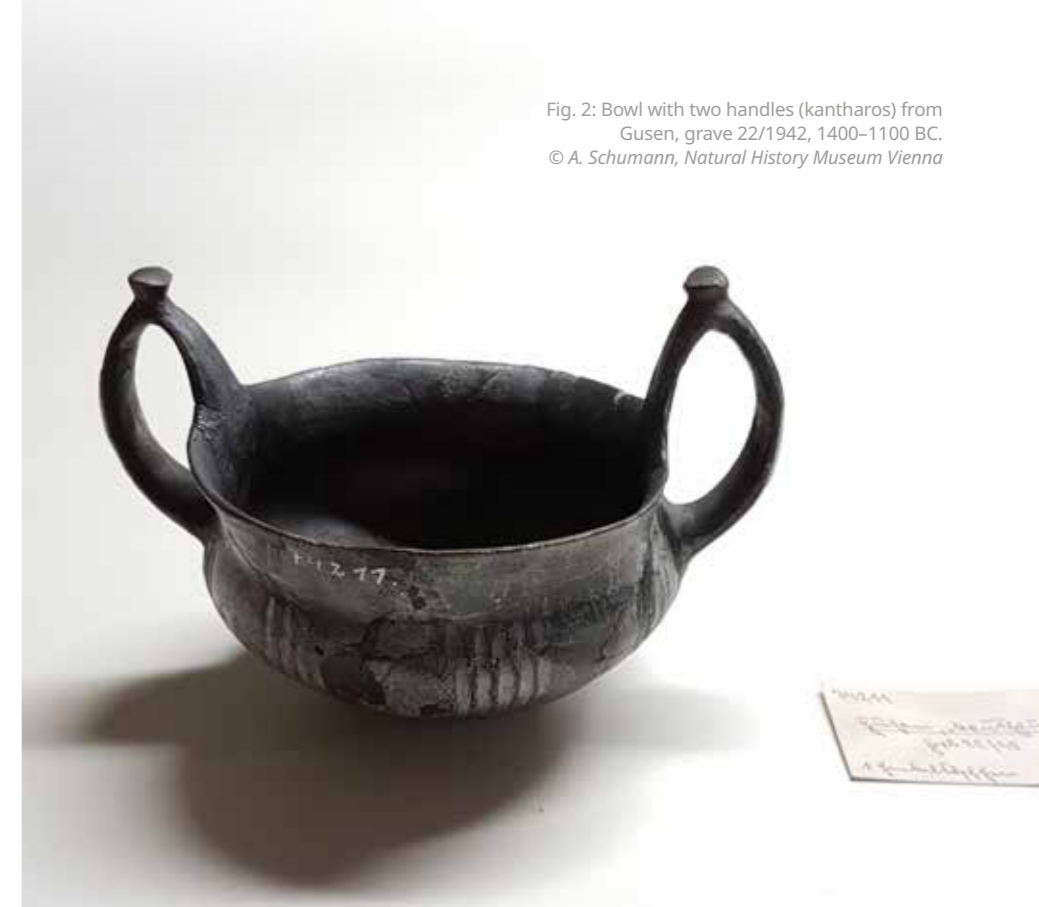
The floor of the exhibition space features an enlarged representation of a grave find – this is to draw the visitor into the exhibition's mise-en-scène (Fig. 1). The drawing of grave 5/1941 was made by detainees.

### Display case 1 'Archaeology – the Late Bronze Age cemetery'

Upper Austria and the Lower Mühlviertel region have a history stretching back thousands of years to the Stone Age. Of particular interest here is the Late Bronze Age cemetery in Gusen, which was created by local population as a final resting place for their deceased and happened to be rediscovered during Nazi dictatorship.

The cemetery from the early and middle Late Bronze Age (1400-1100 BC) may have contained up to 200 graves, but its exact size and expanse can not be determined. According to eyewitness reports, 80 to 100 graves were destroyed during construction of the railway line in 1941. In 1942 and 1943, further work was accompanied archaeologically by Josef Vockenhuber and Hertha Orel (Institute for Monument Preservation, now the Federal Monuments Authority Austria). Forty-seven graves and a further 73 findspots (probably additional graves that initially had not been recognised) are relevant for scientific analysis. The cemetery predominantly contains cremations (urn graves, often with stone settings, and urned and unburned cremation together with burned material)

Fig. 2: Bowl with two handles (kantharos) from Gusen, grave 22/1942, 1400-1100 BC.  
© A. Schumann, Natural History Museum Vienna



and also inhumations. Grave goods consisted mainly of jewellery and clothing items (bracelets, pins) as well as ceramic vessels. Of particular note is the 'warrior's grave' (grave 5/1941): a male burial with sword, lance, razor and a bronze cup of the 'Gusen type'.

The archaeological finds from Gusen have been kept at the Natural History Museum Vienna since the 1950s (Fig. 2), but so far have not been shown publicly nor contextualised within the history of their discovery. In the initial scientific analysis and publication of the Gusen cemetery by Gerhard Trnka and Hertha Ladenbauer-Orel, only marginal reference was made to the circumstances and protagonists of the findings. A contemporary appreciation of the history of the discovery and the persons involved has been a notable desideratum.

The inventory of the Gusen cemetery is representative of a specific period in archaeological research. The findings include type forms of certain object groups, reflected in the names of these types. One example is the 'Gusen type bronze cup'.

### Display case 2 'Concentration camp context'

The Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp complex is an essential part of Austria's memorial culture dealing with the Nazi regime of terror. This exhibition, revolving around archaeology, addresses the detainees' day-to-day life in the camp as well as of those who were forced to participate in the excavations in Gusen. The excavation and documentation of the Late Bronze Age cemetery was carried out primarily by Kazimierz Gelinek, coordinated



Fig. 3: Plaster figure of a Bronze Age woman based on a Nordic model. Workshops of the Reichsbund für Deutsche Vorgeschichte Reich (Federation of German Prehistory), approximately 1939  
© D. Oberndorfer, Natural History Museum Vienna

within the concentration camp by Father Johann Gruber, and supervised by the young archaeologist Hertha Orel for the Central Office for Monuments Protection (now the Federal Monuments Authority Austria).

Corresponding texts on the surrounding walls recount the biographies of the main protagonists Johann Gruber, Wladyslaw Gebik, Kazimierz Gelinek and Jozef Eugeniusz Iwinski, paying detailed and poignant tribute to these individuals and their research achievements. Those involved through the Institute for Monument Preservation and the concentration camp authorities are characterised as well. Historical film footage of the camp is presented on a screen, together with reports from contemporary witnesses, complemented by the results of the Erasmus+ research project.

Display case 2 shows some materials the detainees were surrounded with, such as everyday objects found during the University of Vienna's excavations at the Mauthausen camp. Spoons, remains of crockery, buttons, an isolator, barbed wire and more tell of the living conditions that had to be endured. In recent decades, a sub-discipline within archaeology has been established dealing with the particulars of contemporary history. Archaeological

methodology is used to refine our knowledge of periods in the not-so-distant past. Through such research, everyday life within forced labour camps becomes tangible.

#### Display case 3 'A look at the instrumentalisation of Late Bronze Age by National Socialism'

The Nazi regime used archaeology among other things to justify its racist ideology. The idea of utilising archaeology and its scientific findings to ideological ends among Nazi elites went so far, that archaeological sites received 'Ehrenschutz' (lit. 'honorable protection') by the Hitler Youth. Further examples include the 'SS-Ahnenerbe' ('SS Ancestral Heritage') and the 'Reichsbund für Deutsche Vorgeschichte' (Federation of German Prehistory). The Reichsbund as well as the Hitler Youth produced models, replicas and picture series of prehistoric graves, houses and people, which were didactically used in museums and schools to demonstrate to the general population the supposed cultural superiority of 'their Germanic, Aryan ancestors' and thus reinforce racial ideology.

In display case 3, alongside Nazi era figurines depicting people from the Bronze Age (Fig. 3), there is also written, and pictorial documentation shown of the

graves and finds from the late Bronze Age cemetery in Gusen. This was not merely produced with scientific intent, but in the specific form of a memorial book and a calendar dedicated to Heinrich Himmler.

#### Display case 4 'Spilberg Castle'

A fourth display case focuses on the ruins of Spilberg Castle, another key location where detainees were forced into labour on archaeological excavations. Other than numerous medieval objects from the castle itself, two large gravestones of the Roman era were discovered there.

#### Exhibition layout

The layout of this exhibition invites a flexible approach accommodating individual interests and various visitor groups. The exhibition space around display cases 2 and 3 offers insights not only into the biographies of the highlighted protagonists but emphasises achievements of individuals in terms of documentation work on the excavations, while providing insight into their day-to-day lives, represented by archaeological remains of detainees from Mauthausen.

For a focus on prehistoric archaeology, we recommend the space around display cases 1 and 3, as they focus on the Late Bronze Age cemetery at Gusen, as an important example of the region's history thousands of years ago. Additional information on wall

panels details other periods in-depth as well. Of particular interest is the interplay between the archaeological objects from the Late Bronze Age and the Nazi regime's intent to exploit the prehistoric period as some 'Urgermanische Zeit' ('Proto-germanic period') for the construction of its racial ideology.

This closes the circle, as it was precisely this ideology in whose name the Nazi dictatorship established the system of concentration camps as an essential element.

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# PREHISTORY AND EARLY HISTORY IN THE GUSEN VICINITY

Jutta Leskovar

The Late Bronze Age cemetery in Gusen is significant in two respects. The most important aspect is undoubtedly the excavation carried out by detainees of the Gusen concentration camp. Nowhere else in Upper Austria is the connection between prehistoric archaeology and National Socialism as clearly evident as at this site. Detailed research into the circumstances of the excavations in its historical context is and remains of great importance.

The cemetery is significant as a Late Bronze Age (1400–1100 BC) site embedded in a landscape that has been inhabited and settled for thousands of years as well as extensively researched archaeologically. With brevity, a few exemplary topics and sites shall be highlighted to elucidate the richness of the archaeological landscape in the vicinity of Gusen. We will also take a

quick look across the River Danube, because a river is never 'just a border'. Upper Austria is not rich in Palaeolithic sites and finds, presumably for reasons related to the history of research. This makes the area around Gusen all the more important for Palaeolithic Age researchers, as it is home to two important sites. Palaeolithic finds were made in the so-called 'Heinrichsbruch' in Mauthausen as early as 1900, but no comprehensive archaeological investigations were carried out. However, extensive excavations were carried out at the famous 'Berglitzl' near Gusen. This is a striking hill on which finds and structures from various periods have been documented, including the Palaeolithic, the Bronze Age (Fig. 1) and the early Middle Ages. Discussions about the significance of 'Berglitzl', especially in connection with the controversial term 'Kultplatz' ('ritual site), are still ongoing.

Surrounding Gusen, Neolithic settlements are numerous evidenced. The foothills of the Mühlviertel highlands reach down to the Danube valley, creating ideal conditions for agriculture and livestock breeding. Human presence has left traces in form of corresponding archaeological finds, many of which can be found in museums and private collections.

The 'Luftenberg' elevation, situated west of Gusen, is particularly noteworthy besides 'Berglitzl' regarding finds of the Bronze Age. This was the site of a fortified hilltop settlement, which the 'Luftenberg's' exposed location directly on the Danube offered itself to (Fig. 2).

No major Iron Age sites are known to exist in the immediate vicinity. Although the district of Perg also includes the well-known Hallstatt cemetery at Mitterkirchen (Fig. 3), it is about as far away from Gusen as the cemetery at Linz-St. Peter (now the VÖEST site), which dates from around the same period.

Close by, on the Danube's southern bank, sits Enns, one of the most important Roman settlements in Upper Austria. The Danube Limes functioned more likely as a membrane than a strict border. Contacts with the area north of the Danube – thus also with Gusen – can be assumed.

The Early Middle Ages, as represented on the 'Berglitzl', have also left their remains in

Fig. 2: Drawing of the ramparts on the Luftenberg  
© Franz Stroh, Archiv  
OÖ. Landesmuseum/OÖLKG



Asten, west of Enns. Raffelstetten, famous for its customs regulations, lies just opposite of the 'Luftenberg' elevation. Therefore, Gusen is embedded in a landscape that has been cultivated for thousands of years while densely populated. Further research shall consolidate this impression over time.

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Fig. 1: Flint dagger from 'Berglitzl'; clearly identified as import from Northern Europe.  
© Ernst Grünberger,  
OÖ. Landesmuseum/OÖLKG



Fig. 3: The so-called 'Mistress Hall' (Herrinnenhalle) in the Mitterkirchen Celtic Village open-air museum. The museum features a replica burial mound with rich grave goods  
© Jutta Leskovar

# SPIELBERG CASTLE LABOUR COMMANDO

Robert Hofstadler

'Spielberg Commando' refers to the labour commando that was involved in archaeological excavations in and around the Gusen concentration camp. The activities of this commando began on 16 October 1940 at Spilberg Castle (present-day name), when excavations and securing activities on the ruins began. On advice of then district administrator Gustav Brachmann, the ruins were to be converted into a large camp and a hostel for the Hitler Youth. To this end, rubble and debris were cleared away, which also marked the beginning of archaeological excavations (Fig. 1).

At the beginning of the project, the commando consisted of 30 Polish detainees, including 27 priests and Kazimierz Gelinek, who was referred to by the SS as 'old professor'. The assembly of the commando was conducted by Kapo Władysław Gębik, but it did not last long. In December 1940, the priests were transferred to the Dachau concentration camp, which dissolved the composition of the commando and led to it being reconstituted, mainly with Polish teachers.

In the spring of 1941, construction began on the railway line that was to connect St.-Georgen-an-der-Gusen railway station with the general area of the concentration camp. During construction work, finds from the Late Bronze Age were discovered. Once again, the commando was tasked with recovering

these finds. In April 1942, the Department of Archaeology of the Institute for Monument Preservation (now the Federal Monuments Authority Austria) was involved in the excavations. This led to a close cooperation, which continued until the end of 1943.

The first finds, made in 1941, were initially housed in the Perg Heimatmuseum (Local History Museum). Unfortunately, with exception of a few replicas, these exhibits were lost due to a looting in January 1946. During the functional era of the concentration camp, a museum was set up in one of the SS barracks, where the commando spent much of its time documenting and restoring the finds. Due to varying workload, the commando's staff fluctuated from an initial 30 people to just one detainee. For lack of necessary materials and chemicals, many exhibits could not be restored in the camp museum, wherefore they were transported to Vienna for professional restoration. This led to a busy exchange of artefacts between Gusen and Vienna.

The commando was repeatedly deployed to Spilberg Castle, where the particularly significant discoveries of two Roman gravestones were made in the winter of 1941/42. The larger of these gravestones was 2.26 metres high, 0.90 metres wide and 0.25 metres deep.

In a report, Kazimierz Gelinek states that around Christmas 1942 a commemorative book with 186 pages of hand-drawn illustrations was hastily produced. The

drawings depicted the finds to scale. Several copies of this commemorative book were produced (see articles by Haunschmied, Antl-Weiser and Theune).

A pocket calendar for 1943 was produced by detainees working in the railway office (see article by Antl-Weiser and Theune). The calendar contains drawings of finds from the camp museum and had an estimated circulation of 100 to 200 copies.

Due to an increase of Allied air raids on the armaments industry in 1943, concerns grew that the valuable exhibits in the camp museum could be damaged or lost. On 5 October 1943, Himmler's office issued an order to pack the 'SS Collection Gusen' into crates and transport it to a karst cave in 'Franconian Switzerland' (Germany), where it would be kept safe from bombs. The contents of three of the crates are at the Natural History Museum Vienna today.

The number of commando members continually declined in subsequent years until only two people remained: Kazimierz Gelinek and Tadeusz Murasiewicz. The two processed the remaining finds, producing numerous documents and drawings in the course. Tadeusz Murasiewicz focused on the research of medieval potters' marks.

The prehistoric finds of the nine sites in and around the Gusen concentration camp were examined by Gerhard Trnka (University of Vienna) and Hertha Orel (see article by Tiefengraber). The excavations had unearthed finds from various periods, from



Fig. 1: Drawing of the Spilberg Ruins by J. Iwiniski  
© Federal Monuments Authority Austria, Department of Archaeology, Mauerbach, provincial files archive (Ortsakten) Langenstein-Gusen

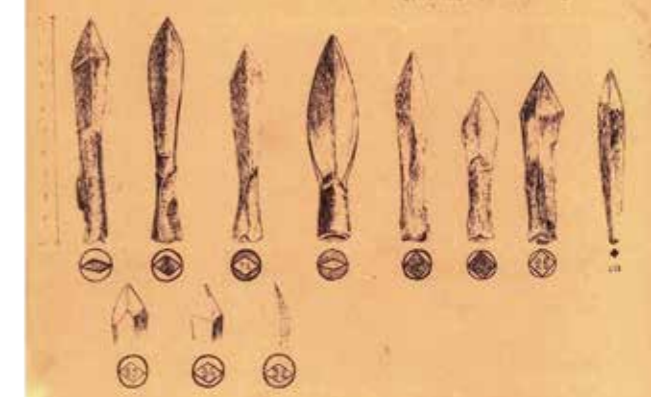


Fig. 2: Drawings of a selection of crossbow bolt heads, found at the Spilberg Castle  
© Federal Monuments Authority Austria, Department of Archaeology, Mauerbach, provincial files archive (Ortsakten) Langenstein-Gusen

Roman times to the Middle Ages. In addition to Roman gravestones, coins from the same period were discovered as well. Finds from the Early Middle Ages included crossbow bolt heads (Fig. 2), stone cannonballs, musket balls, fragments of decorated vessels, stove tiles, potters' marks, crown glass with leading, sandstone sculptures, seals with stamps, dice, coins and tools. The commando also carried out geological and palaeontological investigations. Numerous geological profiles, sketches and drawings were made, and samples were taken.

In the spring of 1944, fossilised bone material of a sea cow was discovered at a depth of 18.7 metres. The head of the sirenia could not be recovered due to a risk of collapsing the excavation walls. Eleven sites with tertiary animal bones were found, in addition to shark teeth and a fossilised piece of wood.

The particularly remarkable find of a mammoth bone was made at a depth of 1.7 metres. Other mammoth remains were found at a depth of 7 metres, including a tusk, a molar, a vertebra and a thigh bone. Further mammoth bones remained in the ground. A blade scraper and a stone axe were discovered in the same layer. The tusk and other parts are now reportedly in museums in Linz. The remains of a cave bear were discovered in the Gusen quarry at an approximate depth of 1.60 metres. The remains of an aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) skeleton were found at a depth of 1.20

metres between the Gusen quarry and Kastenhofer manor.

On 5 May 1945, the day the concentration camp was liberated, excavations were terminated.

The remains of the 1940–1945 SS collections Gusen, which had not been transferred to bomb-proof facilities, were kept in Gusen and at Spilberg Castle. Three sketchbooks containing substantial scientific materials, tracing paper, clichés, stencils, photographs, drawings of palaeontological animals, etc. remained in Gusen. The crossbow bolt heads are kept at the Mauthausen museum. The collected geological materials and geological profiles also remained in Gusen. They were signed with Kazimierz Gelinek's detainee number 43041.

Despite the loss of a large part of the collection, Kazimierz Gelinek and Tadeusz Murasiewicz were able to secure many documents and records. Gelinek entrusted documents to his confidant, the restorer Josef Vockenhuber from the Institute for Monument Preservation. He had worked very closely with Josef Vockenhuber on the excavations and restoration of excavated objects. They managed to store documents in Vockenhuber's hometown of Hallstatt. Murasiewicz stored his documents with the forester Missbauer, who lived in Spilberg. These documents were later taken to the owner of the ruins. On 2 April 1947, a Polish restitution officer demanded the return of all records based on a certified letter from

Murasiewicz. These records included a folder with drawings, a book with source material and pottery drawings, and an album with photographs. Today, these original documents are kept at the Archaeological State Museum in Warsaw and the Masovian Museum in Płock.

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# THE FINDS FROM THE LATE BRONZE AGE CEMETERY AT GUSEN

Excavation and museum storage

Walburga Antl-Weiser and Claudia Theune

The finds from the area of the Gusen concentration camp, in particular the objects from the Late Bronze Age cemetery at Gusen, constitute a collection that in many respects is significant for the Prehistoric Department of the Natural History Museum Vienna.

The collection of finds is undoubtedly a culturally and historically valuable asset that illustrates the importance of the region, especially in the late Bronze Age (see article by Tiefengraber). However, the finds are also inextricably linked to the history of their discovery, which is briefly outlined here. These objects were part of a museum that was set up in the Gusen concentration camp. A group of approximately 10 to 12 detainees, who were part of two special forced labour commandos, had excavated, cleaned, partially restored and then stored the finds in the museum under the direction of Herta Orel (later Hertha Ladenbauer-Orel) and Josef Vockenhuber in accordance with the archaeological standards of the time. The two forced labour commandos, the 'excavation commando' and the 'museum commando', were described in the memoirs of one detainee as a 'seemingly unreal oasis in the middle of the desert of evil.'

Gusen shows that the detainees were constantly exposed to the arbitrariness of the camp administration, whether they had to perform forced labour on the excavations, in the quarries or in the armaments industry.

The fate of priest Johann Gruber (see article by Haider) illustrates how quickly one could be made a victim and be killed. National Socialist conviction becomes evident in the person of Karl Chmielewski, who from 1940 to 1942 held the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer and was commandant of the concentration camp Gusen I. He did not view the detainees as human beings, but as material source for labour always at his disposal. He openly advocated the maxim of 'extermination through work'. Under his rule, approximately 10,000 detainees perished.

## The excavation

There is no documented evidence of finds allegedly made during the construction of the SS barracks in February 1940. According to rumours, a young SS officer informed Walter Wüst, president of the 'Ahnenerbe' ('SS Ancestral Heritage'), of these finds. Archaeological excavation and preservation work is known to have taken place at the Spilberg Castle in the Danube wetlands in November 1940, involving approximately 30 Polish detainees (see article by Hofstadler). Gustav Brachmann, a member of the NSDAP and then district administrator of Perg, was also authoritatively involved in the archaeological investigations. Brachmann was a jurist, born in 1891. He was very interested in the history and archaeology of the region, founded the Mühlviertel Local History Museum in Freistadt and was eager to establish a local history museum in Perg.

He became district administrator of Perg in 1938, but was dismissed in 1943 and placed under the supervision of the State Police to finally get expelled from the NSDAP in 1944. Despite a few critical comments of his, e.g. regarding 'alcoholised camp guards' in Mauthausen, he specifically asked the camp management to use detainees for excavations at Spilberg Castle, thus also making use of the National Socialist concentration camp system.

During construction of a rail track from St. Georgen station to the stone crusher plant in 1941, the Late Bronze Age graves were found. Gustav Brachmann discovered some of the skeletons and grave finds in the spoil, recovered them and incorporated them into the Perg Museum, although some graves had already been destroyed by this point. Brachmann's discoveries were reported on by the Oberdonau-Zeitung on 17 May 1941, the Salzburger Volksblatt on 19 May 1941, the Kärntner Volkszeitung on 19 May 1941 and the Innsbrucker Nachrichten on 21 May 1941. According to the records of Polish detainee Gelinek (see article by Haunschmied), Brachmann had been commissioned by camp commander Karl Chmielewski to set up a camp museum for the finds as early as June 1941.

The Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna (now the Federal Monuments Authority Austria) was informed in April 1942 by Oswald Menghin, professor of prehistory in Vienna, who had heard about



Fig. 1: View of the excavation from the west, Oswald Menghin in the centre  
© Federal Monuments Authority, Department of Archaeology, Mauerbach, Photo Archive, Langenstein-Gusen Excavation, Photo 159

the archaeological finds in the Gusen camp area by chance. A letter from Kurt Willvonseder, then head of the Department of Prehistory and Early History at the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna, SS Obersturmführer and member of the 'SS Ahnenerbe' ('SS Ancestral Heritage'), to Wolfram Sievers, managing director of the 'SS Ahnenerbe', reveals that he considered interference in the activities of the camp to be a very sensitive matter. A passage from a letter clearly shows this: 'To his credit (camp commander Chmielewski's), he was very committed to the finds; a Polish professor (Kazimierz Gelinek) drew all the finds in their natural size. A solution must be found that takes into account Chmielewski's good will and the law.' The letter also proves that

the use of detainees for the excavation was not initiated by the Institute for Monument Preservation, but began on Chmielewski's orders, after detainees had already been forced to perform forced labour at Spilberg Castle. Newspaper reports from June and July 1942 – 'Völkischer Beobachter Wien', 'Salzburger Volksblatt', 'Linzer Tagespost', 'Neuigkeits-Weltblatt-Wien', 'Obersteirische Volkszeitung', 'Innsbrucker Nachrichten', 'Heimatblatt Steyr' – reported near conformly on the archaeological finds from the Gusen camp area. Some articles also praised the achievements of SS Hauptsturmführer Karl Chmielewski.

In principle, the excavation in Gusen fell within Willvonseder's area of responsibility. The conservator Vockenhuber was assigned

to supervise the work in Gusen (Fig. 1). When Willvonseder was drafted into the Waffen SS to serve in Serbia on from November 1942, he was replaced by Hertha Orel, who occasionally stayed overnight in the concentration camp area. Documents of the Federal Monuments Authority Austria contain diary entries (Fig. 2) and her correspondence with Vockenhuber, who often was on site at the Gusen excavations, as well as correspondence with camp commander Chmielewski and his successor Johann Beck (from autumn 1942). Willvonseder tried to keep Hertha Orel's presence in Gusen as brief as possible.

In a report to the Ministry of the Interior in 1965, Hertha Orel mentioned 50 inhumation and cremation graves, but far more sites

Grabung im KZ Lager Gusen, Gde Langenstein.  
 //

6.10.1942 Abfahrt in Wien 13.30 mit Herrn Vockenhuber.  
 Ankunft in Gusen 17.59.

7.10.1942 Begehung der Fundstelle am Eickkogel mit Hauptsturmführer  
 Chmielewski, Prof. Menghin, Landrat von Perg Dr. Brachmann  
 und Dr. Troh aus Linz, auf den umliegenden Höhenzügen wurden  
 keine Merkmale von Siedlungen angetroffen, doch von Prof.  
 Menghin angeregt auf die Ausläufer des Kogelberges Suchgrä-  
 ben zu ziehen. An der Stelle des Grabes aus der Jüngeren Hall-  
 stattzeit wurden noch Scherben und einzelne Knochen gefunden.  
 Die begonnenen Suchgräben auf der Fundstelle am Eickkogel  
 wurden fortgesetzt und dabei neue Gräber aufgedeckt.

8.10.1942 Die Aufzeichnungen des Häftling Gelinek überprüft, ein Lage-  
 plan des ganzen Grabungsfeldes angelegt, dasselbe photogra-  
 phiert und mit der Ausgrabung der einzelnen Gräber begonnen.  
 Alle Gräber werden vorher von und gezeichnet (die Steinsetzung  
 steingerecht, meist im Maßstab 1:16) fotografiert dann ausge-  
 graben und ein Fundbericht geschrieben. Die von den Häftling  
 schon vorher angefertigten Zeichnungen werden in der Verwah-  
 rung des Lagers belassen werden, damit auch dort sich Belege  
 befinden.

9.10.1942 Bei starkem Regen wurde die Grabung fortgesetzt, dann aber  
 in einem geeigneten Raum geheizt, die Scherben von Grab II  
 gewaschen, abgetrennt, getrocknet und die Zusammensätze be-  
 gonnen. Dabei wurden der Häftling Gelinek und Gruber genau-  
 estens in allen Einzelheiten unterrichtet. Eine Liste von  
 den bei der Reichsstelle für Chemie zu beantragenden Prä-  
 parationsmittel wurde aufgesetzt und auch abgeschickt.  
 Andere im Lager selbst zu beschaffende Werkzeuge und  
 Präparationsmittel wurden bereitgestellt.

10.10.1942 Die Grabung auf dem Eickkogel fortgesetzt. Da die Gräber im  
 abgegrenzten Raum schon abgegraben waren, wurden außerhalb  
 in nS Richtung Suchgräben gezogen.

Herr Vockenhuber bleibt im Lager um die Grabung fortzu setzen, ich  
 fuhr um 20.00 Uhr in St. Georgen ab nach Wien, Ankunft 24.00 Uhr.  
 Einzelheiten über Grabinhalte und Maßstäbe und die Zahl der Gräber  
 sind dem in Gusen verfertigten Grabungsbericht zu entnehmen.

Orel 13.10.42.

Fig. 2: Diary entries by Hertha Orel from 6 October 1942 to 10 October 1942  
 © Federal Monuments Authority Austria, Department of Archaeology, Mauerbach, provincial files archive (Ortsakten) Langenstein-Gusen

that were highly likely to be irregularly opened graves. In the report, she also explained the working methods and how the finds were handled in the camp. A grave's number was written on the finds in Arabic numerals, the sites of discovery were written in Roman numerals. The detainees cleaned and preserved the objects to the extent possible in a makeshift workshop. Select pieces were restored in the workshop in Vienna. According to Hertha Orel, the group of detainees, led by Kazimierz Gelinek from Poland, who had archaeological training, not only carried out the excavation work and restored most of the finds, but also made life-size drawings of the most important finds. After their cleaning and restoration, the finds were exhibited in the so-called museum barrack in one of the SS buildings which are still in existence today outside the actual camp grounds. This was formerly also called the bath and hairdressing building. Johann Gruber, a Catholic priest, was entrusted with cataloguing the finds on from autumn of 1942. Gruber was director of this museum until April 1944. With Vockenhuber's support, Gruber managed to smuggle messages to the public in boxes sent to Vienna. Gelinek (see article by Haunschmied) had already gained experience in archaeological excavations in Poland and was in technical terms likely more skilled than many of the voluntary members of Institute for Monument Preservation. He also led the



Fig. 3: Calendar page 21 June – 10 July 1943  
 © Mauthausen Memorial Archive, OS0236\_23

excavations in Gusen from the outset. Gelinek's detainee Identity Card denotes him as museum director, since he had previously managed the museum in Plock. He was transferred to Gusen on 9 April 1941 and employed as foreman in the SS museum from 20 August 1941. Written in pencil underneath is 'Lagerkdo.', which referred to the museum's location. Thus, he was likely one of the first detainees to be housed in Gusen I. Gelinek asserted his rights to the publication of the excavations in the daily newspaper on 29 September 1945.

**A calendar and a commemorative book**

A calendar was produced for the camp authorities in 1943, which presented numerous finds in drawings (Fig. 3). The calendar, measuring 11.5 x 9 cm, opens with an unsigned introduction describing the excavations of the Late Bronze Age cemetery and the medieval ruins of Spilberg Castle, where two Roman gravestones were found. This is followed by an overview of the year divided into months and a map of the Gusen area findspots. Each calendar page covers 10 days. Month and number of days are indicated at the top of each page. Dates are entered on the inside of each page, alongside drawings of various finds and features. These include compilations of objects from the prehistoric cemetery, grave drawings, a mammoth bone from the Palaeolithic Age, Hallstatt period graves

from Langenstein and various illustrations of the medieval ruins of Spilberg Castle. Crossbow bolt heads, medieval potters' marks, cannonballs, Roman gravestones and Roman coins are also depicted. The calendar ends with a detailed timeline based on the state of research of that time. While prehistoric eras are mentioned briefly, other events which had already been recorded in written documents, such as the so-called migration of the Cimbri and Teutons, the victory of 'Hermann the Cheruscan' over the Romans and other wars of late antiquity, are mentioned separately. The dynasties of the Merovingians, Carolingians, Ottonians and Staufers are also listed separately. Interestingly, the calendar refers to (Catholic) church holidays, but there is no mention of National Socialist celebrations or commemorative days. Another important document is a so-called commemorative book, which was created at Christmas 1942 with 85 labelled photos and numerous drawings. There were several copies of this commemorative book for various individuals and agencies, but also

several editions in subsequent years, as is clear from its forewords. The commemorative book measures 31 x 24 x 3.5 cm. One copy was given to Heinrich Himmler, who had a personal interest in the excavations. Himmler visited the concentration camp Gusen where he also inspected the finds, as letters in the Federal Monuments Authority Austria attest. Additional book copies were sent to camp commanders Franz Ziereis and Karl Chmielewski, as well as to the Institute for Monument Preservation. When the commemorative book was completed, with a foreword by Chmielewski that was authored by Oswald Menghin as well as the introduction, Chmielewski had already been transferred and his successor, Johann Beck, was in office. In the foreword, Menghin writes that Chmielewski enlisted the help of 'university professors Oswald Menghin, Rudolf Egger and Camillo Praschniker' for the excavations. Menghin (he writes for Chmielewski about himself) had visited the site several times to observe the excavations and to advise. He would owe particular gratitude to Kurt Willvonseder, Hertha Orel

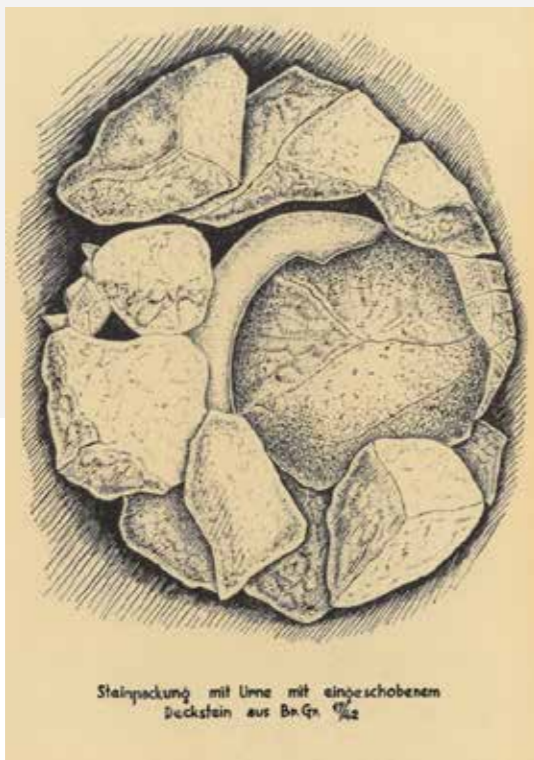


Fig. 4: Drawing of a stone packing with urn from the Urnfield period cemetery  
 © Federal Monuments Authority Austria, Archaeology Department, Mauerbach, provincial files archive (Ortsakten) Langenstein-Gusen

and Josef Vockenhuber from the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna.

Introductory sections are followed by maps showing the locations of the finds in the area. Also drawings of the finds, which are roughly arranged in chronological order and thus divided into chapters. Each chapter is preceded by respective title pages:

- I. Finds from the Stone Age
- II. Finds from the Bronze Age
- III. Bronze finds
- IV. Vessels from the Bronze and Hallstatt periods
- V. Finds from the Hallstatt period
- VI. Finds from the Roman period
- VII. Spielberg Castle finds and blacksmith products of Spielberg Castle

The book begins with drawings of a mammoth bone and a flint flake, perforated stone axes and hatchets. The section about the cemetery begins with a large cemetery

plan and geological profile. This is followed by detailed grave drawings of several cremation and inhumation graves (Fig. 4). The third and fourth sections contain drawings of finds, with notes on the context of each grave. The fifth section presents grave drawings and finds from the Hallstatt period in Langenstein. The important Roman gravestones from Spielberg Castle are not only shown in pictures, but a Latin text all with transcription and translation is included in the commemorative book. A blueprint of Spielberg Castle, various prospects and numerous detailed views, as well as a selection of the 120 crossbow bolt heads, cannonballs and musket balls, potters' marks (Fig. 5) and decorations on medieval ceramics, tiles, a signet with seal, crown glass and dice are presented. Various iron objects as evidence of blacksmithing, as well as medieval and modern coins, conclude the

illustrated section. The accurate drawings are each provided with measurements. The commemorative book concludes with a detailed table of contents. An addendum from 1943 lists various finds from that year. Finally, a handwritten report by Franz Stroh on Spielberg Castle, dated 13 January 1943, and copies of various newspaper articles from January 1943 are also included. Today, at least three copies of different editions are preserved, one in the archives of the Federal Monuments Authority Austria, one in the Vockenhuber estate and one in the Archaeological State Museum in Warsaw.

#### The whereabouts of the finds towards the end of the war

On 28 July 1943, Gustav Brachmann wrote to Hertha Orel about the danger to the Gusener finds due to their proximity to Linz and the increased air raids on the city. He also sent

her a draft letter to the commander of the Mauthausen camp, SS-Standartenführer Franz Xaver Ziereis. Brachmann suggested Innerstein Castle or a secure location in Perg as a so-called 'Bergungsort', meaning a place of safekeeping. This was expressly supported by Hertha Orel. She also noted that the finds were inadequately labelled and that the accompanying notes were insufficient. Therefore, each find would now have to be labelled individually in advance, with the grave number and similar information noted. To this end, restorer Vockenhuber was to be sent to Gusen. In October, however, the Reichsführer SS issued an order to add the finds to a general air raid shelter salvage operation (telegram dated 5 October 1943 to H. Orel). Documents of the Federal Monuments Authority Austria suggest that this may have been done at the instigation of Willvonseder, who wanted to prevent Brachmann from accessing the finds.

Beck wrote to the cultural representative of the Gauleiter and Reich Governor of Oberdonau that the Gusen collection was currently being labelled and packed under the guidance and supervision of Josef Vockenhuber, a restorer, sent to Gusen by the Institute for Monument Preservation. The finds were stored in 10 crates. Immediately after completion of the work, the collection was transported by the research department of the SS Karstwehr Battalion in Pottenstein (Upper Franconia) to Behringersmühle station via Nuremberg for shipment, where it was secured in a converted natural cave. Kazimierz Gelinek - who for a time lived in Schärding after the end of the war, because he had been prevented by the American authorities from crossing the border into Bavaria - was still in correspondence with Hertha Orel at the end of 1945. The correspondence reveals that Gelinek left Gusen on 6 May 1945 and spent the first three days in Linz. In July 1945, he also

visited Vockenhuber in Hallstatt, who still held material for him, presumably documentations. In a letter to Hertha Orel in autumn 1945, he also reports that he had been commissioned by Franz Pfeffer, press officer of the Upper Austrian State Government, to edit a report for the 'Zeitschrift Oberösterreich' (Upper Austria Magazine), which was difficult insofar as he also had to search for his family until October 1945. He was unable to provide any information in this letter on the whereabouts of the crates: 'I don't know, where are those three crates sent from Gusen in 1943, for real?' However, he intended to visit Gusen and Vienna before his return to Poland. In this letter, he described Chmielewski's successor, Johann Beck, as 'a better person than Chmielewski' and was prepared to put in a good word for him if necessary. Gelinek also thanked Hertha Orel for her conduct towards him when he was a detainee in Gusen.

#### The return of the finds

After the war, the crates containing the finds from Gusen concentration camp were taken by Allied forces from the storage site in Behringersmühle to the Munich Central Art Collecting Point (CACP) in the former 'Führerbau' in Munich. The Allies collected from numerous storage sites in Germany works of art, stolen goods and collections from museums that had been 'purchased', that is, extorted by the Nazis and intended for the Führer Museum in Linz, in order to return them to their former rightful owners. The American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas had already been established in August 1943 to protect and recover art and historical monuments in war zones. The commission's representatives were also known as 'Monuments Men'. Munich was the largest of several collecting points in Germany. Upon examination,

artworks were handed over to respective countries, which were then responsible for identifying their rightful owners.

As early as 17 October 1945, Hertha Orel had written to the State Office for Public Information, Education and Cultural Affairs (Staatsamt für Volksaufklärung, für Unterricht und Erziehung und Kultusangelegenheiten) regarding the repatriation of the Gusener finds. She complained about the items being kept outside Austria and that she had been chanceless to oppose Himmler's order. She also mentioned the address of the storage location and enclosed her letter to Kazimierz Gelinek, who was still living in Schärding at the time. She described the collection and noted that the two Roman stones from Spielberg Castle as well as sherds from Gusen, which had not yet been restored, had also not been packed. The letter probably went unanswered for a long time, so Karl Moßler wrote another letter in April 1946 and enclosed this letter.

The records of the Federal Monuments Authority Austria show furthermore that the 18th transport, which arrived on 17 September 1948, brought back three crates of materials from Gusen. As it was not known to whom the objects should be rightfully returned, an enquiry was first made to the Prehistoric Department. Hertha Orel answered the question about the legal owners of the finds by saying that it was not known who the actual landowner of the Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps was. Austrian finds were to remain in the custody of the state until further clarification. The crates had been transferred from the storage site in Middle Franconia to the CACP in Munich and set aside as Austrian property.

In order to determine the identity of the objects, one crate was opened and found to contain objects with notes on them from 1941-1944 that read 'KZ Mauthausen-Gusen'. There is disagreement within the



Fig. 5: Detailed drawings of medieval potters' marks  
 © Federal Monuments Authority Austria, Department of Archaeology,  
 Mauerbach, provincial files archive (Ortsakten) Langenstein-Gusen

documentation about the actual number of crates packed for transport in Gusen. Gelinek's letter to Orel from 1945 states three crates, while Vockenhuber mentions at least 10 to 15 crates in July 1946.

The Federal Monuments Authority holds a certificate of delivery dated 23 November 1948. It confirms that the three crates with prehistoric objects - returned in the 18th American transport from Munich to Salzburg and stored in the Salzburg/Residenz depot - were handed over to the Federal Monuments Authority in Vienna for safekeeping until clarification of ownership. Until a final decision, the objects were not to be distributed to museums.

In October 1950, Orel responded to a letter from Brachmann expressing his concern about the finds at Gusen. She wrote that all the work had been documented in detailed reports and several albums with labelled

photographs. Unfortunately, these were still in Gusen when the camp was dissolved and taken by a detainee who wrote a long paper about them, but would not hand them over without payment. Therefore, she had worked with what was available. She explained once again that she had been unable to enforce the storage of the material at a location in Upper Austria, but had found out the address of the location (in Franconia). She was therefore able to initiate the search in the official list of the office as early as 1945. Three large crates containing a lot of material were found, which were now being restored at the Federal Monuments Authority. A final allocation of ownership has not yet taken place, as this decision was with the Federal Ministry for Asset Protection. At that moment it was still state property.

File No. 45.292-II-6/50 details the dissolution of the Nazi institutions 'Stein und Erde'

('Stone and Earth') and 'SS Ahnenerbe' ('SS Ancestral Heritage') and the forfeiture of assets pursuant to Section 1 of the VG (administration law), Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps and prehistoric finds. The Federal Ministry of Finance, Asset Protection Section, transferred the prehistoric materials from the Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps (3 crates) stored at the Federal Monuments Authority and owned by the federal government pursuant to § 1 VG to the Federal Ministry of Education for inclusion in the prehistoric collection at the Natural History Museum Vienna, as requested. The Natural History Museum Vienna was informed of this on 19 December 1950. Restoration would take about three more months. This cleared the way for the transfer of the finds. According to Federal Monuments Authority documents, Karl Krenn, then head of the

Prehistoric Department, was initially unsure whether to accept the materials. It was to go either to the Upper Austrian State Museum or to the Natural History Museum Vienna. However, after seeing the documents and objects, he came to the conclusion that the finds exceeded the scope and significance of a State museum, as can be seen from a file note dated 14 August 1950.

After being processed in the official workshop of the Federal Monuments Authority, the finds were handed over to the Prehistoric Department of the Natural History Museum Vienna in April 1951. According to a file note from 1950, the Gusen finds needed to be restored again because they had been restored by the detainees without chemicals (shellac was not available at the time). As a result, many of the finds were broken during transport and even whole vessels had to be reassembled in some cases. The first finds from Gusen, which were stored in the Perg Museum, were looted in 1946. The remains of a mammoth and a sea cow from Gusen were sent to the Upper Austrian State Museum in Linz (Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum in Linz).

In a document issued by the Federal Monuments Authority in Vienna, ref. no. 3348/51 (actual ref. no. 69/51), the finds were handed over to the Prehistoric Department of the Natural History Museum Vienna on 21 April 1951 (transfer-, respectively acquisition document no. 60/51). The inventory list was enclosed. Skeletal remains were transferred to the Anthropological Department in

1975. By February 1952, the finds had been inventoried in the Prehistoric Department of the Natural History Museum Vienna with inventory numbers 74.142 to 74.268 by Karl Kromer, signed by Ehgartner. The transfer document from the Federal Monuments Authority erroneously states 74.042 to 74.268, but in the inventory book it begins with 74.142, with the series jumping from 74.041 to 74.142.

The inventory numbers on the vessels originate from Kromer, according to a comparison with Karl Kromer's handwriting. The additional information such as 'KL Gusen' with grave number and year of discovery is in a different handwriting and was already written on the finds in Gusen, as instructed by Hertha Orel before the finds were packed. It was apparently written by the same hand as the labels on the documentation photos. Old labels are still stuck to a few objects, such as a vessel from grave 29/42 on the Danube railway line in Langenstein, which is sketched on the February calendar page. In Federal Monuments Authority file (4871/51), Krenn states that he had not received the finds, which he had presumably marked in red. However, this was clarified by the subsequent assembly of fragments and the handover of two stone axes. The absence of a vessel can be explained by the fact that the list was compiled before the finds were transported from Gusen.

Even after the finds were handed over to the Natural History Museum Vienna, the Federal Monuments Authority reserved the

right to publish them, as Hertha Orel had led the excavation and had already done a great deal of restoratory work. This publication was never completed. However, she ultimately supported Gerhard Trnka in the first comprehensive presentation of the finds from Gusen with her notes and memories.

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# THE LATE BRONZE AGE CEMETERY AT GUSEN

## Its culture-historical significance

Georg Tiefengraber

More than 80 years after its discovery and excavation in 1941–1943 in the area of the former Gusen concentration camp, the Gusen cemetery remains the largest known cemetery in Upper Austria from the late Bronze Age and early Urnfield period (late 14th to at least the 12th century BC). The original number of burials is estimated at around 200 graves, of which only about a third could be documented during the excavations.

The settlement which the cemetery belongs to has not been conclusively located. To consider are the hilltop settlement on the 'Berglitzl', just under 1.8 km to the south-west, as well as the extensive, fortified hilltop settlement on the 'Luftenberg', around 3 km to the west. The location chosen for the cemetery can be explained by its favourable topographical and geographical position. The cemetery, which is now about 1.8 km from the Danube River

banks, is located on the south-western foothills of the Frankenberg and Koglberg mountains on a terrace that is safe from flooding. However, it was once located just north of the Danube. To the west, the cemetery is bordered by the Alte Gusen stream, which flows into the Danube. The Marbach stream, which also flows into the Danube, forms a natural boundary just under 2 km to the east. From a broader perspective, Gusen is located at a transport hub of supra-regional importance. Just a few kilometres to the west, the Traun River flows into the Danube from the south, and the Enns River just east of it. In prehistoric times, salt mined in Hallstatt as well as copper and later iron extracted in the Upper Styrian and Upper Austrian Grauwacke zone reached the Danube in this area. To the north, roads lead via Freistadt to Bohemia and finally to the Baltic Sea. The Danube itself is one of the most important waterways in Europe. Gusen is thus located at a north-south and east-west transport hub that has been of supra-regional importance since prehistoric times.

Fig. 1: The excavation site in the area of the Urnfield cemetery at Gusener 'Koglberg' was cordoned off by the Gusen camp SS administration in 1942 and declared a restricted zone. The photo clearly shows that the graves, which were often surrounded by stones, were first left standing as pedestals and then systematically dismantled  
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Fig. 2: Grave 17/1942 (or Grave V/a according to the old numbering system), discovered on 14 October 1942, during its excavation. The broken urn containing cremated remains was surrounded and covered by stones (photo top right); in the photo below, most of the stones have already been removed and the broken urn is clearly visible.  
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A set of graves was destroyed during their initial discovery in the course of construction of a railway track from St. Georgen an der Gusen railway station to the Gusen quarry in April 1941. Detainees from the neighbouring Mauthausen concentration camp were forced to this work under the supervision of the SS, who commanded this camp and (subsequently) the associated Gusen I to III subcamps. By chance, the Perg district administrator Gustav Brachmann witnessed the removal of spoil containing artefacts from the construction site and was able to rescue a few skeletal remains and grave goods. According to Brachmann's estimates, between 80 and 100 graves had already been destroyed by this point. Since the finds had not been reported to the responsible Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna in 1941, it was not until 1942 that Oswald Menghin, then professor of prehistory at the University of Vienna, happened to learn of the grave finds. He informed Kurt Willvonseder, head of the Department of Prehistory and Early History at the Institute for Monument Preservation, who contacted Carl Chmielewski, head of the Gusen camp, through the SS in Berlin. In May 1942, during a visit by Willvonseder to Gusen, the finds excavated up to that point were grouped together as the 'SS Collection Gusen' and the site was cordoned off with barbed wire. After Willvonseder was called up for military service in July 1942, his assistant Hertha Orel was entrusted with the

scientific management of the excavations, supported by the excavation specialist and restorer Josef Vockenhuber from the Institute for Monument Preservation (Fig. 1). As the excavation was located in the area of the concentration camp, the SS was responsible for supervising the work. Despite the circumstances caused by the war, Hertha Orel managed to carry out and document the excavations in a largely systematic manner. An excavation plan was drawn up immediately but had to be kept in the camp because it showed the exact location of the Gusen concentration camp. Each grave was described, drawn and photographed as circumstances permitted. The surrounding area was systematically prospected with trial trenches. To carry out the excavations, the camp administration assembled a group of detainees under the leadership of a Kapo, the Polish detainee Kazimierz Gelinek, who had received training in the basics of excavation techniques and makeshift find restoration. However, important finds were taken to Vienna, restored there and then returned to Gusen, where they were exhibited together with the finds prepared by detainees in the camp's so-called museum barrack (see article by Haunschmied). Remarkably, the prisoners produced a calendar with drawings of finds for the camp authorities and other members of the Nazi elite. In 1942, they even produced a commemorative book with 85 labelled drawings and photos for the Reichsleitung SS.





Fig. 3: Selection of bronze and ceramic finds from various graves and other objects from the Gusen cemetery. The bronze sword, spearhead and bronze cup come from the richest grave in the cemetery, grave 5/1941  
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Apart from the estimated 80 to 100 graves destroyed at the beginning of construction work, 13 graves and 18 additional 'sites' recorded in 1941, some of which may also have been graves, could be reconstructed based on information provided by Gustav Brachmann. In 1942, another 30 graves and 34 additional 'find sites' were uncovered and documented, and in 1943, four more graves and 21 'find sites' were uncovered

and documented. Due to the increasing bombing of Reich territory, the finds designated as the 'SS Collection Gusen' were subjected to air-raid protection measures on the orders of the Reich SS leadership, carefully packed in crates and brought to safety in a natural cave in Pottenstein/Upper Franconia (see article by Antl-Weiser and Theune). Unrestored finds remained in Gusen, where the excavation commando

of detainees continued restoration work in the museum barracks instead of being sent to work in the quarry, which would have meant certain death for many of them. The finds that had remained in the Gusen concentration camp went missing after the camp was liberated in May 1945. Only three of the crates of finds taken to Pottenstein were still available after the end of the war and were handed over to the Federal Monuments Authority in 1948. The finds were finally transferred to the Natural History Museum Vienna in 1950, where they are still kept today. The surviving inventory unfortunately represents only a part of the original cemetery. A good many has been lost, is incomplete or cannot be reconstructed at all.

After evaluating all available documents, Gerhard Trnka was able to conduct a thorough review of the findings and discoveries from the Gusen cemetery in 1992 and publish a summary and evaluation, most notably with assistance of Hertha Ladenbauer-Orel. Consequently, not only the important Bronze Age cemetery itself, but also the detainees who worked under most difficult conditions, received belated recognition.

Of the estimated 200 graves, about one third were recorded and documented as 'graves' or 'find sites', although the 'find sites' were probably also largely graves (priorly damaged or irregularly opened).

Based on the finds that have been handed down and the excavation documentation that is still available, it can be concluded that the cemetery was in use from the end of the Middle Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age or early Urnfield period, i.e. from the end of the 14th to at least the 12th century BC. The vast majority of the graves are cremations, with only a few cases of inhumation (Fig. 2). One (double) grave shows a biritual burial consisting of an inhumation and a cremation. Based on the grave goods, this appears to be the oldest datable grave in the Gusen cemetery. Due to the clothing and jewellery components (bronze dress pin and bronze arm rings) and a specific vessel this grave can be dated to the end of the Middle Bronze Age (stage Bz C2; 14th century BC). The inhumations were predominantly oriented in a north-west to south-east direction. Only two graves were oriented north-south. Stone settings or kerb sets are sometimes found with inhumations. The inhumation in the biritual grave 19/1942 was oriented in south-north direction in a crouched burial on right side. It is striking that the burials are confined to the north-western and western areas of the cemetery, while only cremation graves were found in the entire southern and eastern parts – with the exception of the biritual grave 19/1942 in the far south-west. Here again, we encounter two types of burial: the deposition of cremated remains in

vessels or urns as well as simple scattering of ashes, by which cremated remains were distributed throughout the grave pit. Of this type of burial there are several documented cases of cremated remains enclosed by an elongated, multi-layered stone packing or kerb sets that could be up to 2.8 m long and up to 1.7 m wide.

Simple kerb sets are also frequently found with urn burials, where biconical vessels or large cylinder-necked vessels usually served as urns for cremated remains. In only a few cases additional grave goods and jewellery was found inside an urn. In most cases, they had been placed next to it. In addition to the biconical and cylinder-necked vessels used as urns, the graves contain almost exclusively vessels and decorative forms that are characteristic of the so-called Middle Danube Urnfield culture, but not of the neighbouring regions of Upper Austria, Salzburg and southern Germany to the west. The Middle Danube Urnfield culture, whose westernmost representative is the Gusen cemetery, covered the areas of Lower Austria, South Moravia, south-western Slovakia, parts of western Hungary, Burgenland and Styria. It was largely homogeneous in terms of material culture and funerary practices (Fig. 3). This Middle Danube vessel spectrum also includes bowls and footed bowls, dishes, pots, small dishes, bellied cups often decorated with vertical flutes, and characteristically

profiled cups with high-standing handles. A singleton that remains is a fine-clayed, light grey double-handled vessel, comparable to objects of the so-called Baierdorf-Velaticer group of the Middle Danube Urnfield culture. Only in a few cases more extensive sets of ceramic vessels were placed in the graves, such as in graves 13, 16, 22 and 24 from 1942. In most cases, only individual vessels and occasionally other vessel sherds have been preserved. However, it is precisely here that the uncertainty becomes apparent, as numerous ceramic vessels were left behind at the Gusen concentration camp for restoration at the time and were lost after the end of the war. As expected, the metal finds are dominated by clothing and jewellery, such as dress pins and arm rings. These are finds particularly significant in terms of detailed chronology.

The type series of dress pins begins with a Middle Bronze Age Wetzleinsdorf-type neck-eye pin, followed by a globe-headed pin with a horizontally fluted head, a Middle Bronze Age-style pin with a triple-thickened, horizontally rippled head, three Göggenhofen-type seal-headed pins (Bz C; 14th century BC), two so-called Paudorf pins, a coil-headed pin, three pins with so-called 'Bohemian profiling', a club-headed pin and three spindle-headed pins of the Gemeinlebarn type, which are typical of the Late Bronze Age and Early Urnfield periods Bz D and Ha A (13th to 11th century BC). In most cases, however, the Middle

Bronze Age pins occur together with more recent forms, such as bronze arm rings, so that the use of these pieces of jewellery is evident until the late Bronze Age. This is also attested to by the pottery vessels found with them. The style of arm rings is dominated by solid, coarsely rippled pieces, which are particularly characteristic of the late Bronze Age stage Bz D (13th century BC). Simple twisted and smooth round-bar arm rings, on the other hand, enjoyed longer popularity and can only be roughly dated from Bz C to Ha A (15th/14th to 11th century BC). The latter stage also includes thin-bar twisted neck rings with hook ends. Two finely decorated sheet metal arm rings – one with volute-shaped ends and one with disc-shaped ends – are again clearly dated to the Middle Bronze Age, although the arm ring from grave 1/1941 undoubtedly only entered the grave during the Late Bronze Age stage Bz D due to its biconical and coarsely rippled design. We see the same phenomenon in the most richly furnished grave 5/1941 of the Gusen cemetery. This was the grave of an important man, who had been buried with a bronze cup, a bronze sword, a bronze razor and a bronze spearhead.

From a research-historical perspective, the bronze cup and razor are particularly noteworthy, as their specific characteristics allowed for the definition of distinct types, both of which were named 'Gusen type' in pertinent literature. The bronze cup of the

Gusen type, the showpiece (Fig. 4) of the cemetery, is bellied, has a short, bended rim and a separately riveted, ribbon-shaped handle. Such bronze cups are found primarily in the Carpathian Basin (here mainly in hoards), where they are also likely to have originated. The eponymous Gusen specimen is the westernmost piece and can be classified as type Bz D. The bronze sword can be identified as an Asenkofen-type sword with flanged hilt-grip and also defines its own variant of this type ('Gusen variant'). This extremely popular type of sword is found in a very large area stretching from southern Scandinavia to Western Carpathia, with a focus on the southern German-Upper Austrian Danube region. The sword is basically a Middle- or Tumulus Bronze Age type (stage Bz C; 15th/14th century BC) but was apparently in use until the late Bronze Age. The same applies to the bronze razor of the Gusen type, which is a double-edged knife with a slightly trapezoidal frame handle. However, the inventory of the rich grave does not appear to be complete, as both a dress pin, which would normally be expected, and grave goods are missing or have not been preserved.

Based on funerary practices, grave types and grave goods, it is very clear that the Gusen cemetery is based on Middle Bronze Age and Tumulus Bronze Age traditions and at the same time shows continuity into the Late Bronze Age and Early Urnfield period. It cannot be ruled out that burial mounds

were erected over the oldest graves – most probably the inhumations in the northern and western parts of the cemetery and above the graves with stone settings – which later gradually disappeared and were not (or no longer?) detectable during excavations.

Despite all uncertainties caused by the partial loss of excavation documentation and missing finds, Gusen cemetery is one of the most important archaeological sites in

Upper Austria due to its size, the surviving grave goods and the cultural affiliation of most of the finds to the Middle Danube Urnfield group.

Finally, it should be mentioned that older Neolithic as well as younger Hallstatt and early medieval finds from the 1941–1943 excavations prove that the area was in use continuously throughout prehistory and early history.

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Fig. 4: Bronze cup of the Gusen type from the rich male grave 5/1941. The contemporary inscription on the underside of the vessel documents its origin from the inhumation ('SK.GR.' 5/41 in the area of the Gusen concentration camp ('K.L.')

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# DR. JOHANN GRUBER

(1889–1944)

Andreas Haider

Johann Gruber (Fig. 1) was born in 1889 in Tegernbach near Grieskirchen (municipality of Schlüßlberg) as the son of shoemaker Andreas Gruber and his wife Maria. He was the eldest of four children. In 1900, both parents died within just five months. The children were placed with different foster parents, Johann with the Fischer family in the neighbouring village of Moos.

The parish priest of Grieskirchen, Dean Georg Wagnleitner, recognised Gruber's talents while he was still at school and became his patron. Wagnleitner enabled the orphan to attend the Petrinum (Grammar School) in Linz. After graduating with honours, Gruber entered the Linz seminary and was ordained as priest in 1913. Between 1914 and 1918, he served as chaplain in the parishes of Gaspoltshofen, Alkoven and Steyregg. He also worked as spiritual advisor to the Catholic Workers' Association.

In 1918, Gruber switched from pastoral care to teaching and taught at the Hart-Leonding branch of the Catholic orphanage in Linz. It was here that Bishop Johannes M. Gföllner became aware of the talented young priest. The diocese needed well-trained teachers for the church school system. Gruber was therefore sent to Vienna to study history and geography.

In particular the philosophical and pedagogical courses he took attest to

his interest in contemporary, progressive education. This was to have a fundamental influence on his later work as teacher and school headmaster. In 1923, Gruber obtained a doctorate in philosophy with his dissertation 'Bavaria in the Spanish Succession Question and its Battles on Upper Austrian Soil 1702–1704'.

Back in Linz, Gruber returned to teaching at the Catholic orphanage, later also at the episcopal teacher training college, the Kreuzschwester Grammar School (Sisters of The Holy Cross) and other private schools. His modern, lively teaching style inspired his pupils and left a lasting impression on them. He enjoyed spending his holidays travelling abroad, often as tour guide. Gruber was also interested in foreign languages and was fluent in English, French and Italian. He is known to have taken language courses at French universities during summer months. These language skills later proved to be of great use to him in the Gusen concentration camp, especially in his contact with French and Belgian detainees.

Towards the end of the 1920s, Gruber was supposed to be promoted to director of the orphanage. He was initially appointed provisional director of the orphanage's secondary school. However, he came into conflict with his superior, Canon Vinzenz Blasl. The dispute, which continued to escalate and even led to proceedings before the diocesan court, resulted in both

opponents leaving the orphanage in 1934. Gruber moved to the Institute for the Blind. In addition to his teaching activities – he taught history, geography and religion as well as stenography at various church schools and at the railway workers' union – he wrote two books that were primarily intended for use in the classroom. In 1933, his history book 'Oberösterreichs Vergangenheit im Rahmen der österreichischen Geschichte' (Upper Austria's Past in the Context of Austrian History) was published. Even then, Gruber clearly spoke out against Austria's annexation to Germany, writing: „As the examples of Switzerland, Denmark and other small states show, Austria's viability must be maintained; [...] Although some advocate for Austria's annexation to the large economic entity of the German Reich, Austrian industry in particular fears that it will be severely impaired by the German economy' (quoted Gruber, 1933, 197). In 1936, Gruber's 'Meißbüchlein für Kinder, welche der heiligen Messe andächtig beiwohnen wollen' (Mass Booklet for Children Who Want to Devoutly Attend Holy Mass) was published. With illustrations, child-friendly explanations and prayers, it was intended to make it easier for children to participate in Latin Mass, which was still practised at that time. The book was reprinted until the 1950s.

In 1934, Gruber was appointed director of the Blindenanstalt (Institute for the Blind). He immediately set about reforming the

institution. His plan was to merge the school and the charitable institution in one building on Volksgartenstraße. To this end, he had the building that had previously housed only the charitable institution expanded. Gruber also introduced educational innovations, such as co-education for girls and boys. His goal was to educate the pupils to lead independent lives despite their disability. However, his reforms met with resistance both from the Sisters of the Holy Cross, who were responsible for domestic affairs at the Institute for the Blind, and from within the teaching staff. The sisters even took the conflict to the bishop, and the intrigues that were woven against Gruber as a result are said to have contributed to the accusations that were levelled against him shortly after the so-called 'Anschluss' (annexation). With the 'Anschluss' in March 1938, Johann Gruber became the target of Nazi injustice. Gruber made no secret of his opinion of National Socialism and the 'Anschluss'. On the one hand, he was an advocate of Austrian sovereignty, on the other, he completely rejected Nazi ideology. In private conversations he repeatedly predicted that Austria would not enjoy the promised good years after the 'Anschluss', but that the Nazi regime would bring long-term hardship, deprivation and misery to the country. Two teachers who had long wanted to get rid of Gruber as headmaster collected these statements and at the same time coerced

female students and nuns at the Institute for the Blind into making false statements that Gruber had sexually abused them. In May 1938, Gruber was reported to the Gestapo and arrested. The ensuing trial dragged on until June 1939, partly because Gruber and his lawyer Ludwig Pramer repeatedly pointed out inconsistencies and procedural errors and exhausted all legal remedies. In June 1939, Gruber was sentenced to two years in harsh prison in Garsten. From there, he was transferred to 'protective custody' at the Dachau concentration camp in 1940. The same year, he was transferred to the Gusen concentration camp, which was considered one of the most brutal concentration camps (see article by Dürr). Gruber was initially assigned to the infirmary as nurse and medical clerk. Even there, he managed to secretly organise medication for detainees. In November 1940, prehistoric artefacts were discovered at Spilberg Castle as well as during construction of the railway track on from 1941 (see articles by Tiefengraber, Antl-Weiser and Theune). As of 1941, some of these finds were exhibited in a designated camp museum located in the SS barracks outside the concentration camp. Wladyslaw Gebik was the Kapo for the archaeology commando until autumn 1942. Johann Gruber joined the museum commando in autumn 1942, initially as administrative assistant. Probably at the end of 1942 or beginning of 1943 he was

Fig. 1: Johann Gruber, etching by Sveda Chkoutova

© Freudenthaler Collection  
(<https://www.dioezese-linz.at/institution/9010/sammlung/medien-sammlung/bilder/gallery/30916.html>)



appointed museum kapo. This position gave him a certain amount of freedom of movement, enabling him to establish contacts outside the camp and use them to set up a covert relief organisation for his fellow detainees. The finds were regularly sent to the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna for examination and conservation and then returned to Gusen. Gruber used this to smuggle cigarettes – a kind of unofficial camp currency – out of the camp and sell them on the black market in Vienna, which he could then spend in the camp on food, medicine and school books. This is how he obtained the ingredients for his famous 'Gruber soup' (Fig. 2), which ensured the survival of many detainees. Together with detained Polish teachers, he also founded a secret camp school for young detainees to strengthen their will to live and give them prospects for a future in freedom. Gruber paid no attention to nationality or ideological background of detainees. This earned him great renown and respect among all groups of detainees. He is also said to have smuggled communion wafers into the camp and secretly celebrated mass with his fellow detainees. They soon called Johann Gruber 'Papa Gruber', probably derived from the French 'Père'. In the spring of 1944, Gruber's covert relief organisation was discovered by the Gestapo and the SS. There are several theories as to how this came about. One says that a group



Fig. 2: The so-called 'Gruber soup' (unknown artist)  
 © Sammlung Freudenthaler (<https://www.dioezese-linz.at/institution/9010/sammlung/mediensammlung/mediensammlung/bilder/gallery/31253.html>)

of communists imprisoned in the camp wanted to learn Russian. Gruber wanted to obtain Russian books through his sister. The bookseller, suspicious of the large number of books ordered, notified the Gestapo. According to another version, a letter from Gruber to Bishop Josephus Calasanz Fließner was lost on a tram and eventually found its way to the Gestapo. A third theory suggests that Gruber was caught smuggling cigarettes.

On 4 April 1944, Johann Gruber was arrested and taken to the bunker of the Jourhaus at Gusen concentration camp. There he was beaten and interrogated by the Gestapo. Gruber took everything upon himself and did not reveal any of his fellow sufferers of the covert relief organisation. Afterwards, SS men tortured him for three days, including camp commander Franz Ziereis and Schutzhaftlagerführer Fritz Seidler. Gruber was so severely injured on the first day that he could neither stand nor sit and was

barely able to move. Even then, Gruber did not reveal anyone else. On Good Friday, 7 April 1944, Gruber was murdered. There are different versions of the exact circumstances of his death, but it can be assumed that Seidler personally killed Gruber.

After the war, Gruber was almost forgotten in Austria, even though immediately after liberation of the Gusen and Mauthausen concentration camps, former detainees had testified to Gruber's work and martyrdom to church authorities. In France, Belgium and Poland, however, the survivors of Gusen kept his memory alive. It was not until the 1980s that Gruber was also remembered in Austria, and since then his fate has been addressed in academia, art and commemorative work. The Gruber case has also been reviewed legally. In 1999, the political verdict was overturned, and in 2016, the sexual offence verdict was also overturned. Johann Gruber is now fully rehabilitated.

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# DIRECTOR DR. WŁADYSŁAW GĘBIK

(1900–1986)

Rudolf A. Haunschmied

The detention of Władysław Gębik (Fig. 1) in the Gusen concentration camp is particularly significant in connection with that of Kazimierz Gelinek and Józef Eugeniusz Iwinski. All three were important protagonists in the archaeological work commandos and all three can be described as pioneers in the field of archaeology in Gusen. However, their achievements were not valued or recognised in the post-war period. In addition to their important archaeological work, they helped other detainees and were active in the resistance within the camp. This helped to strengthen the Polish detainees' will to survive.

Władysław Gębik was born in 1900 in Szczyrzyc (German: Zyrich) near Limanowa (German: Ilmenau), which at that time belonged to the Austrian crown territory of Galicia and is now located in the Lesser Poland Voivodeship. He attended grammar school in Myślenice (German: Myslenitz) and studied agricultural engineering at Jagiellonian University in Krakow until 1924. From 1923 to 1932, he worked as teacher at a grammar school in Katowice and in 1932 he obtained a doctorate in biology from Poznań University. Gębik then taught biology and chemistry at the Polish grammar school in the former border town of Bytom (German: Beuthen) in Polish Upper Silesia from 1933 to 1937.

Between 1925 and 1932, he was also president of the Silesian branch of the Polish Copernicus Society of Natural Scientists. As early as 1934, he began establishing a Polish grammar school in East Prussia, thereby contributing significantly to the development of the curriculum for Polish schools in areas of the German Reich. In November 1937, he finally became headmaster of the Polish grammar school in Kwidzyn (German: Marienwerder) in the exclave of East Prussia, which at that time belonged to the German Reich. It is noteworthy that Władysław Gębik, together with the pupils and teachers of his school, was arrested on 25 August 1939 – i.e. even before the outbreak of the Second World War – as an important promoter and mediator of Polish culture and identity. As a member of the 'Polish intelligentsia', he was deported by the State Police in Grudziadz (German: Graudenz) to the 'Polish camp' in Gusen as part of the so-called 'Polish Action'. His deportation was carried out via the German concentration camps Tapiaw, Grünhof, Hohenbruch, Stuthof and Sachsenhausen to the 'Polish camp' in Gusen, where he arrived on 28 May 1940 and was given detainee number 1472 (No. 43040 from January 1944).

At the Gusen concentration camp, he first had to strip bark from tree trunks and plane them, which were then rammed into the ground as piles for the barracks during

expansion of the camp. He barely survived the earthworks carried out under very brutal conditions on a Sunday in July 1940 for the SS shooting range in St. Georgen an der Gusen (the so-called 'Schützenheim'). Władysław Gębik was then assigned to further construction of the Gusen concentration camp and, among other labour, had to dig trenches for the camp's sewer system under the detainees' blocks. In May 1940, he met his future friend Józef Iwinski in the camp.

When in November 1940 the camp administration sought 'archaeologists' among the detainees for excavation work in the ruins of Spielberg Castle, Władysław Gębik, after some hesitation, volunteered along with Kazimierz Gelinek and a grammar school teacher from Bielsko. They formed the core of the new 'Spielberg commando', which was soon joined by 27 Polish priests. Initially, the comrade from Bielsko acted as Kapo, while Gębik was only responsible for technical supervision of the work.

On 17 November 1940 - at the suggestion of district administrator of Perg Gustav Brachmann, who was also district officer for cultural affairs and monument conservator - camp commander Chmielewski ordered the establishment of a 'Spielberg Castle commando' to carry out excavations. Brachmann came up with the idea of requesting detainees for Spielberg when he saw them returning to the Gusen

concentration camp from hard labour in St. Georgen. At that time, it was quite common in the region for even individual mayors to request concentration camp detainees for construction work in their municipalities. However, this original 'Spielberg commando' (Phase I) only existed for a few weeks, because on 7 December 1940, all the priests in this commando were transferred back to the Dachau concentration camp (see article by Hofstadler). This first commando did not carry out any archaeological excavation work, but was mainly occupied with removing trees, bushes and rubble. Even then, special attention was paid to the former castle chapel, as an old treasure was suspected to be there. In its ruins, the Polish priests cautiously celebrated secret masses almost daily, provided there were no guards nearby.

After Władysław Gębik's comrade from Bielsko was also released from Gusen concentration camp, Gębik himself took over the role of Kapo when the commando was reorganised on 7 December 1940 (Phase II). In the early days, SS-Unterscharführer Biernat, who was also Blockführer (guard) in the camp, acted as head of the commando. Early on, Gębik turned 'his' 'Spielberg commando' into the nucleus of organised Polish resistance and Polish relief in the Gusen concentration camp. He constantly risked his life by allowing physically weak detainees, who would have died in other



Fig. 1: Portrait of Władysław Gębik  
© Mauthausen Memorial, MM 141\_0044  
(Dobosiewicz estate)cz

camp commandos, to be temporarily admitted to his commando for recuperation. When Gębik was housed in Block 9 with 'his' 'Spielberg commando' in autumn of 1940, he also brought the lawyer and poet Włodzimierz Wnuk from the very harsh 'settlement construction' commando in St. Georgen into his 'good' commando. He also rescued the professor of pharmacy Franciszek Adamanis from the same labour camp in St. Georgen.

Protected by significantly better working conditions in the 'Spielberg' archaeology commando, Władysław Gębik and Józef Iwinski initiated first covert meetings with other trustworthy detainees in the Gusen concentration camp at the beginning of November 1940 in order to strengthen the detainees' morale and will to survive. Over time, Gębik's embodiment of moral strength and unshakeable will became essential for his compatriots in Gusen in order to survive and cope with constant exposedness in Nazi captivity. His fellow Polish detainees called him 'Pater familias' for his diverse activities in the Gusen concentration camp. He was also given the nickname 'Baca', which means shepherd or shepherd boy. His later code name in the Polish resistance of the Gusen concentration camp was 'Orlik' (eagle).

Together with his confidants, Gębik also organised the so-called 'Walking University' (Uniwersytet Chodzony) in Gusen, secret school lessons for the many Polish youths.

He also set up a secret scout group for them. Together with Waclaw Milke, he led the so-called 'Living Rosary' from Christmas Eve 1941 onwards, which was intended to give Polish detainees in the Gusen concentration camp the strength and will to survive through prayer.

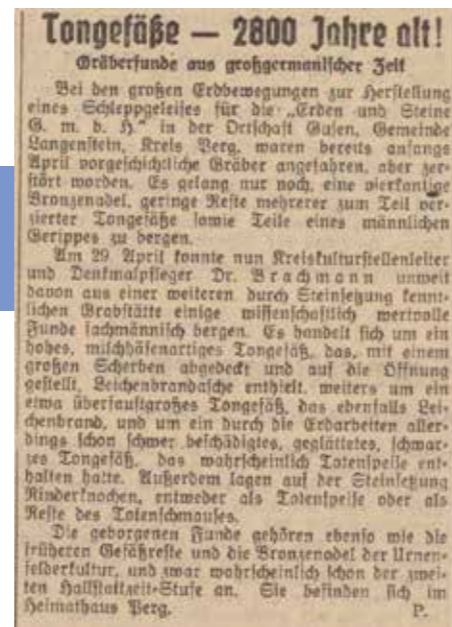
Since no excavation work was possible at Spielberg in the winter of 1940/41, Gębik saved 'his team' over the winter by quickly inventing the new commando designation 'patrol road cleaner'. This bold ruse allowed him to leave the camp with his people every day during the winter to shovel snow, thereby keeping his core team together.

Władysław Gębik led the 'Spielberg commando' for eight months until around June 1941. He divided his comrades into different working groups, which worked on the following structures: the castle chapel, the keep, the ramparts and the walls.

In spring 1941 the commando was only able to return to Spielberg briefly until around the end of April 1941, as the camp authorities had to stop the excavations for lack of enough SS guards. The finds were brought to the camp in June 1941 by Gębik's colleagues Gelinek and Iwinski, who continued to look after them. They subsequently set up the so-called camp museum.

After work at Spielberg was halted, Gębik and several other comrades were sent to St. Georgen to work on the construction of the railway track, since fragments of

Fig. 2: Newspaper clipping from Volksstimme, the official daily newspaper of the NSDAP – Gau Oberdonau No. 136, Saturday, 17 May 1941, p. 4  
 © ONB – Anno: <https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=obz&da-tum=19410517&zoom=33>; (last accessed 3 July 2025)



several urns had been found there. The work of the 'detainee archaeologists' was much more difficult there, as the railway construction commando was one of the worst labour commandos in the Gusen concentration camp. All work had to be done under such time pressure that the senior Kapo in charge, Koleczko, had the detainees in Gębik's excavation commando driven on with batons to make them work faster. After only a few days, Gębik's comrades realised that this area was an eminent archaeological site for all of Central Europe, with important cemeteries from the Late Bronze Age (see article by Tiefengraber). However, economic interests of the construction management and the thefts by SS men initially destroyed much valuable cultural assets and some of the most valuable archaeological finds. Gębik was surprised that even the academically educated German construction manager showed not the slightest understanding for these finds, as he feared that reporting them properly would slow down the construction of the SS railway connection between St. Georgen and Gusen. As a result, Władysław Gębik's commando was soon disparagingly referred to by the SS as the 'bone searcher commando'. Nevertheless, Gębik saved the first finds by collecting them and handing them over in the evenings to his two former colleagues, Gelinek and Iwinski, who were setting up the new camp museum at the Gusen concentration camp. This included a

prehistoric stone axe found at Koglberg in 1941. Shortly afterwards, however, Gębik showed up at the new camp museum in frustration to report that an SS commando leader had destroyed a scientifically valuable warrior's grave from the Late Bronze Age, which Gębik had also identified at Koglberg, decorated with a horse's head. District administrator Gustav Brachmann played an important role in these excavations once again, as he had already had finds from Gusen brought to the local museum in Perg in May 1941. It was probably also Brachmann who ensured that on 21 May 1941 an article was published in the Innsbrucker Nachrichten about the new 2,800-year-old grave finds from the 'Greater Germanic period'. Brachmann allowed himself to be publicly honoured as the discoverer of the finds, without mentioning the scientific groundwork carried out by Gębik and his fellow detainees. The whole of 1941 and the period up to summer 1942 was marked by ongoing interaction between Gębik's excavation commando and district administrator Brachmann. Nevertheless, Gębik's commando gradually lost momentum during this period (Fig. 2). The status of archaeology in Gusen changed abruptly in summer 1942, when SS-Obersturmführer Kurt Willvonseder, the head of the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna (today Federal Monuments Authority Austria), finally became aware of the important cemetery in Gusen (Phase III).

The importance of the archaeological commandos increased significantly again in autumn 1942 when Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler personally visited the camp museum in Gusen on 17 October 1942. This visit led to the already greatly reduced 'Spielberg commando' becoming quickly replenished to eight persons on 24 October 1942, with Gębik personally selecting suitable comrades. Among them at the time were Franciszek Adamanis, Tadeusz Murasiewicz and Leon Królak. A few days later, Johann Gruber, a prisoner from Austria who had been transferred from the district, was also officially transferred to the commando (see article by Haider) to take on administrative tasks, while the commando itself remained with Kapo Gębik for a while. According to Gębik, this day also marks the final transformation of the old 'Spielberg commando' into a new museum commando. Following the dismissal of his good friend and 'draughtsman' Józef Iwinski, and probably also due to the gradual takeover

of the scientific management of the excavations by the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna, Gębik fell into a personal crisis in autumn 1942. From this point on he was repeatedly assigned to other hard labour commandos. What saved him was the fact that he, as former 'teacher' as well as 'agronomist', was assigned to the 'detainees' property room' as 'unskilled labourer' in the camp commando of the Gusen concentration camp as of 19 May 1943. In this manner, the 'property room' of Gusen I became the new centre of Polish resistance in the Gusen concentration camp led by Władysław Gębik since 1940. Many of the detainees who had previously been active in the 'Spielberg commando' under Gębik's leadership formed the backbone of the secret Polish resistance organisations that were established within the Gusen concentration camp. These comrades included Leon Królak, Kazimierz Gelinek, Tadeusz Murasiewicz, Waclaw Milke and Lubomir Szopiński. Towards the end of the war, Władysław Gębik was secretly elected chairman of the Polish resistance in the Gusen I concentration camp and, from 3 May 1945, he also headed the Polish Committee of Liberated Detainees together with Jan Cieluch. Gębik had maintained his firm humanistic attitude in Gusen for many years. He cared for other detainees whenever possible. In addition, soon after the liberation, he served as Poland's representative on the International

Committee of Former Detainees of Gusen. In mid-July 1945, Gębik first returned to his hometown of Szczyrzyc to become head of the grammar school department of the Masurian Education Office. He took on the pioneering task of establishing a Polish school system in the school district of former East Prussian city of Olsztyn (German: Allenstein). At the same time, he also worked to strengthen Polish culture and identity in these parts of East Prussia, which had long been influenced by Germany and which, from 1945 on, belonged to the newly established Polish Voivodeship of Olsztyn. The dissemination of Polish literature, the collection of Polish songs and legends, and the promotion of Polish writers and historians were of particular concern to him. For this comprehensive and decades-long cultural work, Władysław Gębik was also honoured with the Oskar Kolberg Prize in 1975. As a proponent of the Polish Writers' Association, he also wrote numerous literary works himself, some of them under the pseudonym Andrzej Borowik. A central concern of his after the war was the establishment of a 'Temple of Martyrs' with a colossal crucifix made in Poland from Gusen granite. This was also to be the final resting place for the countless small cube-shaped urns that had been secretly made in the Gusen concentration camp since 1943 and which are now located at Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, Wrocław Cathedral and St. Anne's Church at the University of Warsaw.

Władysław Gębik died on 23 March 1986 in Krakow and was buried in the church yard of Szczyrzyc. In 1987, Primary School No. 6 in Kwidzyn was named after Władysław Gębik. In 2015, a commemorative plaque was unveiled in his honour at his former residence in the city of Olsztyn.

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# KAZIMIERZ GELINEK

(1882–1969)

Rudolf A. Haunschmied

As a detainee in the Gusen concentration camp, Kazimierz Gelinek (Fig. 1) – like Władysław Gębik and Józef Eugeniusz Iwinski – played a key pioneering role in the Gusen archaeological research. This was largely neither mentioned nor acknowledged in the post-war period. He is representative of many other Polish intellectuals who, as part of their national elite, were detained in the Gusen concentration camp. Because of their placement in the archaeological labour commando, he and his comrades had a somewhat better chance to survive. These labour commandos were also the nucleus of the first covert relief organisations and resistance groups in the camp.

Kazimierz Gelinek was born in 1882 in Brzezany (German: Breschan) near Tarnopol, which at that time belonged to the Austrian crown land of Galicia and is now located in western Ukraine. After spending his school years in Tarnopol, he served for three years from 1907 in the Imperial and Royal Uhlan Regiment 'Archduke Franz Ferdinand' No. 7 in Stockerau. He used his savings from the military service to finance his higher education, which enabled him to work as a teacher at the primary school in Zazulince on the Dniester River. Gelinek was drafted back into the Uhlans at the beginning of the First World War, but like thousands of other Polish soldiers, he

followed the call of their interim government in 1916 to cease hostilities and return home. Gelinek then devoted himself to the development of the school system in the district of Zamosc (German: Zamosch) as a school inspector in the newly developing Polish state as well as to the establishment of an associated teachers' training college, where he himself taught as a 'professor'. While continuing to work, Gelinek began studying geography in Krakow in 1922, graduating in Lviv in 1926. He subsequently settled in Płock, the former capital of Mazovia, where he again worked as a professor at a local grammar school and at the state teachers' training college. He increasingly collaborated on issues of geology and archaeology with the local Mazovia Museum and the Płock Scientific Society, which, founded in 1820, is one of the oldest scientific societies in Poland still in existence. As curator of this museum, which was founded in 1821, he established a new natural history and ethnological department as of 1926, which included the archaeological collections. In addition, Gelinek successfully worked on countless research projects in the fields of archaeology and geology until 1939. Kazimierz Gelinek was arrested on 9 April 1940 since he had repeatedly refused to register as an ethnic German and, as curator, had stood in the way of German soldiers in November 1939 when they were looting archaeological finds in 'his' museum. As a

member of the 'Polish intelligentsia', he was deported by the State Police in Ciechanów (German: Zichenau) via Działdowo (German: Soldau) and the Dachau concentration camp to the 'Polish camp' in the Gusen concentration camp, where he arrived on 26 May 1940 and was given detainee number 232 (No. 43041 from January 1944). In Gusen, he first had to labour in the Kastenhof quarries and then on the construction of the railway tracks. Kazimierz Gelinek, along with Władysław Gębik and a grammar school teacher from Bielsko, was there from the very beginning when the 'first' 'Spielberg commando' was formed on 17 November 1940 (Phase I). He refused to become a Kapo or Oberkapo in this commando, even though, at 58, he was the oldest and most experienced detainee. Instead, Gębik took over the de facto leadership of this first commando and the teacher from Bielsko took on the role of Kapo. One of Gelinek's first tasks at that time was to map the Spielberg Castle ruins. Even in this early period (Phase II), Gelinek was in charge of a small collection housed in a barrack that the 'Spielberg commando' had set up in the former castle courtyard during the first five weeks, to store and process the finds. He was assisted in drawing and documenting by Józef Iwinski. As former curator of the museum in Płock, Gelinek was technically very skilled and made tables, display cases and shelves for this

first 'museum' at Spielberg Castle. Because of his distinct woodwork and carpentry skills, his comrades affectionately nicknamed him 'Święty Józef' (Saint Joseph), even though he was already de facto the most knowledgeable archaeologist in the 'Spielberg commando'. It was crucial that this highly experienced archaeologist from Płock was able to convince Gustav Brachmann, the district officer of cultural affairs, monument conservator and district administrator of Perg, of the scientific value of the finds already made in the first half of 1941, stored in 'his' small museum barrack at Spielberg. Brachmann was accompanied at the time by camp commander Chmielewski, who was the first person in the Gusen concentration camp to refer to Gelinek appreciatively as the 'old professor'. After SS personnel most likely had broken into Gelinek's small museum barrack to steal artefacts twice, camp commander Chmielewski - at the suggestion of District Administrator Brachmann - ordered in June 1941 that the Spielberg collection be moved to a separate premise at the concentration camp for safekeeping. This led to the creation of the small 'museum' labour commando in the Gusen concentration camp, which initially consisted of only two detainees. These were 'the old professor' and his 'draughtsman' Iwinski. This second 'museum' was located just outside the concentration camp in the long building that is still in existence today,

which also housed the hairdressers for the SS commandos. This is how the so-called camp museum came into being at the southern edge of the Gusen concentration camp, with 'Kasimir' Gelinek as its director from that point on. In official terms he was appointed as overseer in the so-called SS Museum in the camp commando of the Gusen concentration camp as of 20 August 1941. He was supported in this role by Józef Iwinski, who effectively became his assistant until early September 1942. After Iwinski was dismissed, Kazimierz Gelinek was solely responsible once again for the so-called 'SS Museum', which other detainees were strictly forbidden from entering. After the discovery of the stone axe at the railway construction site in spring 1941, it was also Gelinek - according to Iwinski - who pointed out to camp commander Chmielewski that further important finds could be expected in the Koglberg area. Hence camp commander Chmielewski ordered Gelinek and Iwinski to 'scientifically supervise' the railway construction from then on and granted them full freedom of movement for this purpose. This was coordinated with the senior kapo and the SS commanders heading the railway construction. In public, however, District Administrator Brachmann alone was celebrated as the 'expert excavator' of the first scientifically valuable finds made there,

as evidenced by several newspaper articles from 17 May 1941 onwards (see article on Gębik by Haunschmied). It should be noted that in August 1941 detainees from the 'Spielberg commando' and the SS museum were not allowed to leave the concentration camp due to a typhoid epidemic, meaning that the second Roman gravestone found at Spielberg in 1941 could not be excavated and examined until October 1942. 10th of September 1941 marked another important milestone for Kazimierz Gelinek and the collections he curated in Gusen, as it was the day when the expansive inhumation, later designated 5/41, was excavated, revealing extensive stone settings and rich, unique grave goods from the Late Bronze Age. Word of the significance of these finds must have spread quickly among experts, so that after the winter break in April 1942, Oswald Menghin from the University of Vienna first brought the important finds in Gusen to the attention of the Institute for Monument Preservation and the SS-Ahnenerbe (SS Ancestral Heritage) in Berlin. Allegedly, it was once again Gelinek who made it clear to camp commander Chmielewski in the spring of 1942 that an even larger prehistoric cemetery was to be expected in Gusen and that this promising area of finds should be reported to the scientific community. However, as the pace of railway construction



Fig. 1: Portrait of Kazimierz Gelinek  
© Andrzej Prinke

Fig. 2: Announcement from 'Neue Zeit', organ of the Communist Party – Upper Austria No. 224 Friday, 27 September 1946, p. 4  
 © Quelle: ONB – Anno: <https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=nzl&datum=19460927&zoom=33> (letzter Zugriff 3. Juli 2025)



was not slowed down, Iwinski and the other detainees had no choice but to continue rescuing bronze objects and ceramic vessels off the shovels, off of the wagons and directly from the spoil.

The fact that many of the sites destroyed by the SS in their haste at that time have been professionally documented to this day is solely due to the outstanding scientific merit of Gelinek's relevant work in Gusen.

Even the head of the Department of Archaeology at the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna, SS-Obersturmführer Kurt Willvonseder, noted on 21 May 1942, after an initial visit to camp commander Chmielewski in Gusen, that the excavations were being carried out professionally by two Polish 'professors'. After his on-site inspection, he confirmed to the Reichsstatthalter in Oberdonau on 29 May 1942 that the detainees employed were suitable and capable and that detailed reports were available that allowed the finds to be scientifically evaluated.

Until June 1942, Gelinek and Iwinski had to rely solely on their own expertise in managing the SS collection in Gusen. It was not until June 1942 that they received support from an external expert, Josef Vockenhuber, a restorer from the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna sent to Gusen by Kurt Willvonseder.

When Willvonseder was taken to the actual cemetery at Koglberg for the first time by camp commander Chmielewski on 3 October 1942, the latter ordered that the blueprint of the cemetery, which had already been systematically assembled by the detainees themselves, continue to be used.

Willvonseder confirmed to the SS-Ahnenerbe (SS Ancestral Heritage) in a letter dated 5 October 1942 that the excavations in Gusen had been carried out up to that point solely by detainees who had been found suitable for the task on the basis of their previous training. These detainees had proved themselves entirely capable of the task, which was clearly the main achievement of Gelinek. Finally, on 9 October 1942, Kazimierz Gelinek, together with Johann Gruber, was instructed by Hertha Orel, who worked as Kurt Willvonseder's assistant in Gusen, on how to restore the vessels found in a grave. A highlight in the archaeological collection activities led by Gelinek in the Gusen area since 1940 must have been the visit of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler to the camp museum on 17 October 1942, which was largely built up by Kazimierz Gelinek and Józef Iwinski. It was likely Gelinek's systematic collection of Iwinski's drawings that made it possible to produce a commemorative book on the excavations in Gusen for Heinrich Himmler. This took place in just a few days and nights in time for Yule in December 1942.

At the end of 1942 additional commemorative books and calendars for 1943 with drawings by Iwinski were produced for the SS. This was facilitated again by the railway construction office and likely under the leadership of Gelinek (see article by Anti-Weiser and Theune).

Until October 1943, Gelinek and his fellow detainees worked closely with restorer Vockenhuber and Hertha Orel from the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna, before Reichsführer SS Heinrich

Himmler ordered the air raid rescue of the SS collection in Gusen, which was under Gelinek's care. It is noteworthy that Gelinek was not told at the time where 'his' collection, packed in three crates, would be taken. The museum commando was subsequently reduced in size again, so that by the end of 1944 it consisted only of Gelinek and Iwinski's successor, Tadeuz Murasiewicz. In addition to prehistoric and historical work, the two also carried out geological and palaeontological work and created geological profiles in the course of the extensive tunnel construction projects in St. Georgen and Gusen that were pushed forward in 1944 until liberation in May 1945.

According to his own statement, Gelinek weighed only 34 kilograms when he was liberated from Gusen concentration camp. He left Gusen just one day after liberation on 6 May 1945. After a three-day stay in Linz, he intended to go to France. However, the Americans did not allow him to cross the Inn River, so he found refuge in Schärding until autumn 1946.

It is noteworthy that 'the old professor' resumed his geological and ethnographic research work in Schärding. From Schärding, he visited restorer Josef Vockenhuber in Hallstatt in July 1945, as the latter had saved some of his excavation materials from Gusen. Unfortunately, his three large sketchbooks and many printing blocks had remained in Gusen and were in all probability lost there. When Franz Pfeffer from the Culture and

Press Department of the Upper Austrian State Government asked Gelinek on 29 September 1945 to edit a report for the 'Zeitschrift Oberösterreich', he had to decline. He was preoccupied searching for lost family members in September and October 1945, of whom he found only one daughter. Unfortunately, his wife was no longer alive. After his search, he wrote the requested ten-page manuscript on a typewriter in just three weeks in November 1945.

Only after completing this task did he find the time, on 27 November 1945, to reply in excellent written German to a letter that 'Fräulein' Hertha Orel had written to him some time ago. Gelinek and Orel had been in correspondence again since at least autumn 1945, which continued until his return to Poland in September 1946.

At the end of February 1946, Gelinek wrote further detailed descriptions in Schärding about the 'Excavations on the left bank of the Danube near Linz in the years 1940–1945', which contains a wealth of regional contextual knowledge. Two language versions, Polish and English, are still preserved today. In April 1946, Gelinek complained of serious health problems, shared by many former detainees liberated from German concentration camps. He felt mentally so badly that he could no longer see or speak to anyone. He suffered from nausea and poor hearing, for which he sought treatment in Salzburg at the time. When he felt better again, he visited libraries in Innsbruck and Bregenz. He also carried out research work in Enns and Mauthausen. Before returning to Poland, Gelinek attempted to secure his copyrights to the

historical materials he had collected in St. Georgen, Gusen and Spielberg, by means of a public announcement in the Linz newspaper 'Neue Zeit' on 27 and 28 September 1946 (Fig. 2).

The copyrights claimed by him and Tadeuz Murasiewicz were not recognised by the Federal Monuments Authority Austria in 1947, on the grounds that the work had been carried out under the supervision of Vockenhuber and Orel. However, this argument is completely irrelevant for the period between November 1940 and the end of May 1942, because until that time, Gelinek and his comrades worked largely on their own, at a scientifically remarkable, high level. Unfortunately, the Federal Monuments Authority Austria ruled clearly to Gelinek's disadvantage. This weighs all the heavier given that even Willvonseder, as representative of the Gau administrator of the Institute for Monument Protection in Oberdonau, confirmed in writing to an official of the Reich Governor's Office in Linz on 29 May 1942 that the detainees employed in Gusen were suitable and capable.

Even Hertha Orel, former representative of the Gau administration of the Institute for Monument Protection in Oberdonau, confirmed in an official memo dated 28 December that it was 'Kasimir' Gelinek who had spent years digging and restoring the site with great effort and care.

When Gelinek returned to Płock at the end of 1946, he initially found no place to stay and lived on the streets for three months. In Płock, he also had to learn that his collections from 15 years of scientific work had been lost in the turmoil of the war and that he would

no longer be able to complete his doctorate as he had planned.

It was not until 1947 that he was able to return to teaching at the technical college of the vocational training centre in Płock. Around 1950, he was unemployed for a while and then worked as a teacher at a secondary school for labourers until his retirement on 1 September 1956.

In 1959, at the age of 77, he presented Józef Iwinski, his friend and former comrade from the "Spielberg commando", for his saint's day with a copy of the 1942 study entitled 'Excavations in the vicinity of KLM-Gusen/Oberdonau/1940–1942...' as well as his sketchbook with original drawings by Iwinski. Gelinek had inscribed the sketchbook with a dedication to Iwinski, which touched him deeply at the time. Kazimierz Gelinek died in 1969.

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# DR. JÓZEF EUGENIUSZ IWINSKI

(1904–1990)

Rudolf A. Haunschmied

**Józef Eugeniusz Iwinski (Fig. 1) was a notable Polish concentration camp detainee who carried out important archaeological research with limited resources in Gusen, but received little recognition. Together with Władysław Gębik, Kazimierz Gelinek and other comrades, the comparably less exposed circumstances in the archaeological labour commandos gave them a chance to survive and even establish the first relief and resistance organisations in the Gusen concentration camp.**

Józef Eugeniusz Iwinski was born in Łódź (German: Lodsch) in 1904. He graduated from secondary school in 1924 and then studied at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Warsaw until 1928. Subsequently he worked as assistant in the Department of Mineralogy and Petrography at the University of Warsaw. In 1932, he dedicated his doctoral thesis at the University of Łódź to the topic 'On the Dolomites of the Polish Tatra Mountains' and, as a Doctor of Chemistry, again worked as a mineralogist and raw materials expert in Warsaw.

After the German Reich had invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, Iwinski worked for the underground 'Home Army (ZWZ)' as teacher for Polish soldiers wounded in the war, whom he secretly taught commodity

economics at Ujazdowski Military Hospital in Warsaw.

Iwinski was arrested at this hospital on 29 April 1940 and was detained in the notorious Gestapo prison 'Pawiak' in Warsaw until 2 May 1940. From there, he was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp on 3 May 1940 for a few weeks of quarantine and then deported with 1,100 other detainees to the new 'Polish camp', the Gusen concentration camp, where he and his comrades in suffering arrived on 28 May 1940. Theirs was the first transport of detainees from Pawiak to Gusen concentration camp.

In Gusen, he was given detainee number 1596 and was housed in Block 9. Once in the camp, he became friends with Władysław Gębik early on. In Gusen, like hundreds of his compatriots, he was initially forced to work in the harsh 'stone carrier' commando, and later in 1940 in the 'earth movement' and 'road construction' commandos. He was so severely mistreated during this labour that by December 1940 he already had a damaged kidney, a double hernia, a ruptured eardrum and broken teeth.

When, during the evening roll call on 7 December 1940, camp commander Chmielewski personally selected new detainees for the 'Spielberg commando' from all those lined up, Iwinski was assigned. This strengthened his hope of surviving Gusen concentration camp. The 'Spielberg

commando' now consisted of a total of 30 detainees, most of whom were teachers. They were provided with better clothing and even leather boots for this 'external commando'.

Shortly before that, in early November 1940, Gębik and Iwinski initiated the first secret meetings with trustworthy detainees. The meetings were intended to strengthen morale and the will to survive. The recital of poems, which many of the intellectual detainees knew by heart, played an important role. Iwinski risked his life when he helped his comrade Edmund Romatowski to organise a Christmas celebration in secrecy for their fellow comrades in the washroom of Block 9.

From the very beginning, Józef Iwinski belonged to the inner circle of the Polish resistance which was slowly forming in the Gusen concentration camp. He was also the good spirit of the 'Spielberg detainees' community, nourishing it with his innate optimism, self-sacrificing camaraderie, friendliness and warmth, despite the horrendous conditions in the extermination camp.

While his colleague Gelinek was mapping the layout of the Spielberg Castle ruins during excavations in 1941, Iwinski, acting as Gelinek's assistant, contributed several initial drawings of the ruins (Fig. 2). His aim was to illustrate condition and appearance of the

castle ruins as naturalistically and faithfully as possible. With the same intention, he also documented the first finds made there in drawings – and later also a large number of bronze objects, urns and vessels excavated during the construction of the railway.

Józef Iwinski made his first drawings in pencil on paper torn from cement sacks. It was only during a later visit by district officer of cultural affairs, monument conservator and district administrator Gustav Brachmann - together with camp commander Chmielewski - that Brachmann suggested the commando should be given real drawing paper, erasers, tracing paper, ink, pencils and colouring pencils. Some of these impressive drawings were incorporated into the commemorative book between 17 and 21 December 1942 containing the excavation results. Gelinek's fellow detainees had to produce this book under intense pressure as gift from the camp SS to Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler for Yule 1942.

It was in 1941 or 1942 that the talented artist Iwinski was almost beaten to death when he and other members of the 'Spielberg commando' were tortured 'for fun' on a Sunday in the Kastenhof quarry by Kapos, jealous of their privileges, forcing them to load and push wagons with heavy stones. It is not surprising that he and his comrades repeatedly prayed for their safe return to



Fig. 1: Portrait of Józef Iwinski  
© Mauthausen Memorial, MM 141\_0023  
(Dobosiewicz estate)

a free homeland in the ruins of the castle chapel in Spielberg.

In September 1941 during construction of the railway, Iwinski was the first to recognise, that a human skull found by chance, surrounded by five stone fragments and accompanied by a bronze sword and a bronze mirror (inhumation 5/41), must be a prehistoric grave. He documented the site, measuring approximately 12 x 7 metres, with drawings (see articles by Tiefengraber, Grömer and Hirsch).

This sensational find aroused great interest in camp commander Chmielewski. As no further excavations were carried out during the winter months of 1941/42 due to construction of the railway, Iwinski focused on organising his drawings in the camp museum. This resulted in a folder of drawings from Spielberg and another folder of drawings from Koglberg, which contained the first drawings of urns and ceramic vessels found in the cremation graves in 1941, when the detainees were still investigating on their own. Due to his talent, Iwinski became known as 'the draughtsman' among fellow detainees and also among the camp SS in Gusen.

After SS-Obersturmführer Kurt Willvonseder - as head of the Institute for Monument Preservation in Vienna and representative of the Gau administrator for archaeology - became involved in the excavations at Gusen

in early May 1942, he asked camp commander Chmielewski to send him blueprints of the drawings made by the detainees – foremost by Iwinski. Willvonseder realised then and there that when it came to caring for the finds and sites they were in the best possible hands with the detainees.

Until approximately June 1942, Iwinski and Gelinek had to rely solely on their own expertise in managing the SS collection Gusen. It was only then that they received their first external professional support from Josef Vockenhuber, a restorer sent by Willvonseder, and Hertha Orel

When Iwinski was unexpectedly released from Gusen concentration camp on 3 September 1942, Tadeuz Murasiewicz succeeded him as Gelinek's assistant. The departure of Iwinski, who had produced almost all of the drawings up to that point, left a huge gap in the museum commando and plunged his old mentor and friend, Władysław Gębik, into a serious personal crisis, as he was already having to cope with his demotion as a result of the new experts from the Institute for Monument Preservation.

When Iwinski returned to Warsaw in autumn of 1942, he did not hesitate to get in touch with representatives of the 'Home Army ZWZ', later known as 'Polish Home Army (AK)', in order to report on the conditions in the Gusen concentration camp. He worked



Fig. 2: J. Iwinski, drawing of a Gothic window in the castle chapel, Spilberg Castle  
© Federal Monuments Authorities, Department of Archaeology,  
Mauerbach, provincial file archive (Ortsakten) Langenstein-Gusen

closely with the resistance until the initiation of the Warsaw Uprising in September 1944.

After the war, he resumed teaching industrial chemistry and commodity economics at the University of Economics in Łódź in the 1945/1946 academic year. He functioned as expert in industrial raw material economics and also served three times as dean of various faculties. Together with other authors, he wrote economics textbooks and academic papers in the decades after the war as part of his university career and rendered outstanding services to the standardisation of various product groups in Poland.

After the war, he kept in touch with his fellow survivors from Gusen through regular meetings for many years.

In 1959, his former comrade from the 'Spielberg commando', Kazimierz Gelinek, now 77 years old, gave him a copy of what had been saved by the sister of the restorer Vockenhuber in St. Florian, entitled 'Excavations in the vicinity of KLM-Gusen/Oberdonau/1940-1942...!', along with the sketchbook and his original drawings, together with a personal dedication on his Saint's day, which touched him deeply. His original drawings from Gusen stayed with until his death in 1990.

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# MEMORIAL CULTURE IN THE REGION OF AWARENESS

## Mauthausen – Gusen – St. Georgen

Andrea Wahl

The inhumane events during the Nazi era in the concentration camps Mauthausen and Gusen have imprinted the region and its people to this day. Many people in the region, organisations and initiatives have confronted and continue to confront their history with utmost openness and the difficulties that entails.

### Memorial culture is cultural work

In the Region of Awareness, there has been and continues to be an artistic examination of the Nazi era and the system of terror in the concentration camps. This has left traces still visible and audible today. An important example is the sculptural work by Rudolf Burger, a native of St. Georgen an der Gusen, on the railway between St. Georgen and Gusen and the monument at the elevated water tank in Statzing (municipality Luftenberg). The parish of St. Georgen's art project 'Passage Against Forgetting' was jointly decided upon in broad discussion of a participation project. Exemplary for Mauthausen is the art project on the way to the monument in Wienergraben, which symbolises the detainees with skulls by Ewa Kaya.

For 20 years, "perspektive mauthausen" has been organising cultural events with renowned artists such as Michael Köhlmeier, Katharina Stemberger, Konstantin Wecker and many others addressing the complex of themes, enabling remembrance.

The audio tour by Christoph Mayer chm. provides an insight into 'The Invisible Camp' Gusen with contemporary witnesses and residents.

The House of Remembrance regularly hosts exhibitions by artists such as Manfred Bockelmann, Rudolf Burger, Johannes Angerbauer and Renate Moran, which deal with Nazi history and current issues. The monument in front of the House of Remembrance is by Osamu Nakajima, an artist who resided in Langenstein. The neon sign 'How do we remember?' is an artistic intervention by Sarah Feilmayr, Romana Hagyo, Leonie Lehner and Clemens Schrammel from the University of Arts Linz.

### Memorial culture means participation of the public

Since the early 1990s, there have been numerous committed individuals and initiatives in the communities of Mauthausen, Langenstein and St. Georgen that set out to come to terms with Nazi history. While it had long been taboo to address this subject, many questions about local history began to arise from that time on. Contemporary witnesses began to speak out. Articles in local history books of St. Georgen and Langenstein report on the Nazi era. The adult education centre of the Chamber of Labour, which I headed during this period, submitted a project

entitled '75 Years of the Republic – From the Past to the Future' to the then Ministry of Education. Within this framework a 'history walk through St. Georgen an der Gusen' was developed, leading to places and buildings associated with the Nazi past. Dozens of people accepted the invitations to join and took an interest in history. More and more people began to talk about that period.

In 1995, the 'Platform 75 Years of the Republic' was founded, bringing together the market towns of St. Georgen, Langenstein and Luftenberg, the 'Kulturverein Tribüne', the Chamber of Labour's adult education centre, the 'Heimatverein St. Georgen' and the parish of St. Georgen an der Gusen to dedicate themselves to reappraising history. Numerous events took place, such as discussions with contemporary witnesses, the film screening 'Lass fallen den Stein' (Drop the Stone) and the first celebration of the liberation of the Gusen concentration camp in 1995. This movement gave rise to the Gusen Memorial Committee, which is continuously dedicated to coming to terms with the history of the Gusen concentration camp. Within the parish, the Papa Gruber Committee was formed to study the biography of Johann Gruber and initiate commemorative work in the parish.

In 2011, the Johann Gruber Platform was founded to promote exchange and cooperation between organisations active in remembrance in the parishes of Luftenberg,



St. Georgen an der Gusen and Langenstein. In 2005, the market town of Mauthausen saw the founding of 'perspektive mauthausen', an initiative that brought together committed members of the parish and the Socialist Youth to ensure that the Nazi era is not forgotten and to dedicate themselves to coming to terms with it. This initiative holds an annual commemoration ceremony for the 'Mühlviertel manhunt' and has initiated numerous cultural projects. And, of course, the municipalities are constantly confronted with remembrance,

because there are many remains of the Nazi era, such as buildings and tunnel systems, some of which are listed buildings and influence the everyday lives of their residents. For example, the way in which many buildings in Gusen were listed as historic monuments in 2007 initially led to protests among the population. This prompted the mayors of the municipalities of Langenstein, Mauthausen and St. Georgen an der Gusen to take the initiative and convene a round table on 9 November 2011 at the Federal Monuments Authorities in Vienna.

Fig. 1: House of Remembrance in St. Georgen an der Gusen  
© Werbeagentur Online



Fig. 2: Tour of the International Human Rights Symposium  
© Bewusstseinsregion

This process gave rise to the idea of convening 'citizens' councils' and inviting people from the region according to the random principle to develop ideas for commemorative work. Many ideas were collected and discussed. During discussions, it became clear that a structure was needed to implement these ideas. As a result, the Mauthausen – Gusen – St. Georgen Region of Awareness was formed as municipal association and approved by the Federal State parliament in autumn 2015, before commencing its work in January 2016.

A comprehensive professional participation process has now also been initiated for the creation of the master plan for the new Gusen memorial site.

#### House of Remembrance commemorates the 'Bergkristall' tunnel system

The House of Remembrance fulfils a decades-long demand by local memorial initiatives to establish a dignified place of remembrance. The first step was taken in 2013 when the market town of St. Georgen purchased the land directly adjacent to the entrance of the

'Bergkristall' tunnel complex in St. Georgen. In 2019, the opportunity arose to construct a memorial site. A wooden house, previously located in the Münzbach 'Sinnepark', was dismantled in October 2019 and rebuilt in St. Georgen. In May 2020, the office of the Region of Awareness moved in. The house was opened in October 2020. It is a place of remembrance. It is a place of encounter. It is a place of education. It is a place of culture.

#### Memorial culture is educational and research work – some examples

Guided tours have been a tradition in the region since 1995. Rudolf A. Haunschmied developed the tour 'Tracing legacies of National Socialism'. The Papa Gruber Circle has created a box with educational materials about Johann Gruber. The International Human Rights Symposium has been held annually since 2017 around 9 November (Reichspogromnacht) and offers a wide range of events, including tours, workshops, cultural events, film screenings, discussions and children's programmes.

This provides opportunities to learn more about the Nazi era as well as current human rights issues.

The Human Rights Trail from Mauthausen railway station to the House of Remembrance offers audio information at historical locations on the conception of human rights and the biographies of human rights activists from all continents and different periods.

The circulating exhibition 'Forced to work – Willing to Survive' uses examples from Italy, Austria and Poland to illustrate forced labour in the past and present. It offers panels, brochures, films and guidelines for educational work.

Individuals dedicated to research of local history have studied the Nazi era in depth. Rudolf A. Haunschmied has been conducting research on Gusen for 30 years and has edited numerous books. Leo Reichl from Katsdorf has studied the Gusen III camp in depth. Johann Prinz from Langenstein has written an important contribution in the local history publication. Martha Gammer has written many articles in the

St. Georgen local history journal. Robert Hofstadler has been working dedicatedly on the 'Kommando Spielberg' as part of the current project since 2024.

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# THE HISTORY OF THE GUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP BETWEEN REMEMBRANCE AND REPRESSION<sup>1</sup>

Christian Dürr

On 8 August 1938, with the arrival of the first detainees and SS guards from the Dachau concentration camp, the Mauthausen concentration camp was officially established. Over the course of its approximately seven years of existence, it developed into a network of over forty sub-camps. The Gusen concentration camp, which was established at the end of 1939 just four kilometres away in the municipality of Langenstein, occupied a special position within this camp system. More than just a sub-camp, Gusen was a kind of branch-camp of the main camp at Mauthausen.

The reason for choosing Mauthausen and Gusen as locations for concentration camps were granite quarries that existed there. In order to exploit these, the SS had already founded the company 'Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke GmbH' (DEST) in April 1938, which set up its administrative headquarters in neighbouring St. Georgen an der Gusen. Initially, the SS sent detainees in large numbers from Mauthausen to work in the quarries in Gusen and back again. In December 1939 labour began on the construction of a sub-camp, which was officially opened on 25 May 1940. In 1941, Reinhard Heydrich, head of the 'Sicherheitspolizei' and the 'Sicherheitsdienst', declared the Mauthausen-Gusen camp system a Level

III camp. For detainees, this meant the harshest conditions of detainment of any concentration camp in the Nazi German Reich. Between 1940 and 1942 in particular, Gusen served as an extermination site within the camp complex. For members of the Polish intelligentsia, Spanish Republicans and Soviet prisoners of war a transfer to Gusen often meant certain death.

From summer of 1943, the quarrying industry in the concentration camps lost its dominance to armament production. The concentration camp detainees of the Mauthausen-Gusen complex were employed in the construction of new armament factories and in the production of war materials such as rifles, tanks and fighter planes. As a result, over forty sub-camps were established and the total number of detainees rose rapidly. In Gusen, too, more and more detainees were forced to work for the war industry on from 1943. From spring 1943, rifle parts for the Steyr-Daimler-Puch AG (SDPAG) were manufactured through forced labour in the Gusen concentration camp.

In September 1943, the DEST reached an agreement with the Messerschmitt GmbH Regensburg to start production of the Me 109 fighter aircraft, for which it had the first underground production facilities built under the code name 'Kellerbau' in November 1943.

In view of the increasing Allied air raids on armaments factories beginning in summer 1943, the SS began constructing one of the largest underground armaments factories of the entire Reich in St. Georgen an der Gusen in early 1944, forcing detainees to labour. In order to house the production of components for Messerschmitt Me 262 fighter aircraft, tunnels with a total length of more than eight kilometres and a floor space of around 50,000 square metres were driven into the mountain under the code names 'Esche II' and 'Bergkristall'. The concentration camp detainees who were transferred to Gusen specifically for this purpose were housed in makeshift barracks of Camp Gusen II (Fig. 1).

In December 1944, the SS forced the construction of the third sub-camp Gusen III, where several hundred detainees built a large bakery to supply the camps. The supply situation in the main camp at Mauthausen and its branch-camp at Gusen became increasingly precarious in early 1945 with the arrival of several large evacuation transports from concentration camps further east, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Groß Rosen and Ravensbrück. The number of detainees rose sharply. The Gusen camp complex, with its sub-camps Gusen I, II and III, reached its peak of more than 26,000 detainees on 27 and 28 February.

After the SS had left the camp on 3 May 1945 and handed over guard duties to units of



Fig. 1: The Gusen concentration camp with its industrial facilities; the barracks of the Gusen II camp can be seen in the background; May 1945  
© U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

the Vienna police force, Gusen was finally liberated on 5 May by a reconnaissance unit of the 3rd US Army. At that time, there were around 20,000 detainees in the three sub-camps. By the end of July, a US military administration had organised the burial of around 1,300 detainees who had died shortly before and after the liberation in a specially created victims' cemetery. It also took care of the sick and repatriated the recovered detainees.

Of the at least 72,000 people detained in the Gusen concentration camp between 1939 and 1945, about half died. Many were victims of systematic mass killings, for example by gassing in the detainees' barracks, in the Hartheim NS Euthanasia killing centre or in '(mobile) gas vans' that travelled between Mauthausen and Gusen.

At the end of July 1945, the US Army withdrew from Gusen and Mauthausen, and the two camps became part of the Soviet occupation

zone. In June 1947, the Soviets handed over the former Mauthausen concentration camp to the Republic of Austria. They made this conditional on the obligation to preserve it as a memorial site. In 1949, the 'Mauthausen Public Memorial' was officially opened. Although numerous barracks and other camp structures had already disappeared, the Soviets' decision was largely responsible for the fact that large parts of the former Mauthausen concentration camp have been preserved in their original condition to this day.

The post-war history of the Gusen concentration camp took a very different course. While the Soviet occupying power continued to operate the former concentration camp quarries as a USIA (Administration for Soviet Property in Austria) enterprise, the former concentration camp and its facilities were largely destroyed by looting and also sales by the end of

the 1940s. In autumn of 1947, the Soviets attempted to render the 'Bergkristall' tunnel complex unusable by blowing it up. Due to the solidity of the structure, this was only partially successful, but the statics of the entire complex were permanently damaged as a result.

After the Soviets withdrew in 1955, most of the former camp grounds became the property of the Republic of Austria. Some areas were returned to their former owners, but most of the former Gusen I and II camps were divided into plots and then sold as building ground. As a result, housing estates were built, literally on the foundations of the former camps, standing to date. Only some original camp buildings remained intact after 1955 that are still in existence. These include the central entrance building (Fig. 2), known as the 'Jourhaus', which was the commander's headquarters; the former camp brothel; two two-storey detainee



Fig. 2:  
Former roll call square with guardhouse, 1955  
© Mauthausen Memorial, Simone Bonnet Collection



Fig. 3: Gravel crusher in its current condition  
© Mauthausen Memorial, Photo:  
Bernhard Mühleder

accommodation brick buildings; two buildings used by the SS for administration, and the gravel crusher (Fig. 3). After 1955, they all came into private ownership and were used as residential buildings or for commercial purposes. Some, such as the *Jourhaus* and the detainees' buildings, were substantially remodelled. Others remained in nearly original condition.

The quarries of the Gusen concentration camp continued to be used industrially by private companies in the decades after 1955. At the end of the 1950s, the victims' cemetery laid out by the US liberators was dissolved and the remains of the deceased were exhumed. Those who could be identified were transferred to their countries of origin, but the majority were reburied at the Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial. In the middle of the housing estate built at the end of the 1950s on the site of the former Gusen I camp, the crematorium oven was the only recognisable building of the concentration camp that remained. By the end of the 1940s, survivors and relatives, mainly from Poland and France, had transformed it into an unofficial memorial and erected commemorative stones. However, it was increasingly seen as a thorn in the side of local and national authorities, which is why the responsible municipality applied to the Republic of Austria for a demolition permit, which was granted. The actual destruction of the oven could only be averted by intervention of international survivors' associations. In the 1960s, the Association of Italian Survivors used donations from numerous countries to purchase the disputed realty and had a memorial erected around the preserved crematorium oven. The 'Gusen Memorial',

inaugurated in 1965, is primarily a memorial site for survivors and their relatives from all over Europe today. It was not until 1997 that the Republic of Austria officially assumed responsibility for its preservation. In 2003, the memorial was expanded to include a small visitors' centre, where the permanent exhibition on the history of the camp was opened in 2005.

As a result of the controversy surrounding the protection of the historic camp remains, a participatory project for citizens called 'Bewusstseinsregion Mauthausen - Gusen - St. Georgen' (Mauthausen - Gusen - St. Georgen Region of Awareness) was launched in 2011 on the initiative of the Federal Monuments Authority. As a result of this, the municipalities of Mauthausen, Langenstein and St. Georgen an der Gusen joined together to form a municipal association of the same name, which has since implemented a variety of projects to come to terms with the Nazi era in this region and to strengthen human rights.

In the early 2000s, the Republic of Austria also assumed responsibility for the remains of the 'Bergkristall' tunnel complex. For safety reasons, this was partially filled in by the Federal Real-Estate Company (Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft). Around a quarter of the original complex could be preserved and secured. One section measuring around 800 metres in length was technically refurbished in a way that it can be opened to visitors on select days during the year. In 2020, the Mauthausen - Gusen - St. Georgen Region of Awareness opened the 'House of Remembrance' near the entrance of the tunnel complex, which is used as exhibition space and for educational programmes. In Lungitz, a memorial stone

has commemorated the former Gusen III camp since 2000. In 2020, after the ashes of deceased concentration camp detainees were found, a cemeterial memorial was inaugurated near the Lungitz railway station. In recent years, the Republic of Austria has been negotiating with private owners of land on the former camp grounds in Langenstein and St. Georgen an der Gusen. In 2021/22, it finally purchased several plots of land in the area of the former Gusen I concentration camp. These plots contain a wide variety of buildings of particular historical value, including the two preserved SS buildings, the former roll call square of the Gusen I camp and the gravel crusher. However, no agreement could be reached with the owners of the 'Jourhaus' and the two detainee accommodation buildings. The Republic also acquired a plot of land in St. Georgen, where the main entrances to the Bergkristall tunnel system and railway connections were originally located.

In coming years, newly acquired plots of land will be developed into memorial sites in close cooperation with victims' representatives, local residents and other interest groups. They will be linked to the concentration camp memorial site surrounding the 'Memorial de Gusen' and intertwined with existing memorial interventions. The Gusen Memorial Site will thus undergo significant expansion.

In order to place the future design on as broad a democratic basis as possible, the Mauthausen Memorial launched a participatory process. Social interest groups at international, national and regional level, as well as experts from various disciplines, were invited to participate. From mid-2022 to mid-2023, a wide variety of

participatory formats were implemented, including numerous workshops, surveys and information events.

The final report on the participation process, including the master plan, was published in October 2023. It presents the opinions, expectations and concerns of various interest groups in their entirety, highlighting key issues and reflecting the broad consensus among the participants on the essential decisions regarding the direction to be taken. The master plan provides well-founded, clear recommendations for further design measures. It formed the basis for an international competition for architecture and landscape planning, which was concluded in the summer of 2025 with choosing the winning project.

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on the introductory text to: Christian Dürr, Gregor Holzinger, Stephanie Kaiser, Ralf Lechner (Hg.): *Konzentrationslager Gusen 1939-1945. Eine Dokumentation* (Wien 2024), S.9-12.  
<sup>2</sup>Available online at: <https://www.gusen-memorial.org/de/Teilnehmen/Erweiterung-der-KZ-Gedenkstaette-Gusen/Endbericht-und-Masterplan-zur-Weiterentwicklung-der-KZ-Gedenkstaette-Gusen> [Zugriff 30.6.2025]

# ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE NAZI ERA

## Two perspectives

Claudia Theune

Archaeology in the Nazi era can be understood from two perspectives. On the one hand, it is possible to look at archaeological excavations from the 1930s and 1940s, i.e. from the time of Nazi dictatorship. This provides insights into the working methods, goals and interpretations, and, where applicable, into the racist ideology and National Socialist view of history based on it. On the other hand, for around 25 years, numerous investigations have been carried out in Austria in former National Socialist concentration camps, other forced labour camps and extermination centres, providing many new aspects of the National Socialist regime of terror, of conditions of detention and survival strategies of victims. Both perspectives will be considered here.

### Archaeology during the Nazi era

Archaeology, or – as it was predominantly known in the 20th century – prehistory and early history, deals with the material remains of human history. Initially, focus was set exclusively on periods for which there are no or very few written sources. It was not until the second half of the 20th century that the discipline gradually opened up to medieval, modern and contemporary phases. The beginnings of prehistory and early history as a scientific discipline date back to the 19th century, particularly its second

half. At that time, archaeological sources were used to trace regional or national history back to periods without written sources. Depending on region, personal views and worldview of the time, the sites and finds were classified as Germanic, Celtic, Roman or Slavic, for example, and it was emphasised that these were the legacies of one's own ancestry. It was thought at the time that the origins of one's own history, one's own nation and one's own (biological) race could obviously be traced back to some distant past. This touches on an important point for archaeological questions and interpretations, which all too often have ideological and political connotations and intentions. Such interpretations, which deliberately glorified one's own nation or history, strengthened a collective national identity, gave meaning and at the same time emphasised the distinction from other ethnic groups (peoples) or (religious) groups. Any indication of a larger settlement area to have existed in the past was taken as determinant of legitimate entitlement to 'ancient regions'. In the National Socialist era, it was emphasised that the "Germans" (or 'Indo-Germans') in particular had gained highest cultural achievements – and were clearly superior to other groups. The origin of their own German national identity – or, in the language of the time, the Germanic ('Aryan') race – was seen in a millennia-old community of common descent from the

'Germanic peoples', on assumption that there had been no changes in the biological composition of the population in intervening centuries or millennia. They even interpreted Palaeolithic finds in Dolní Věstonice (German: Unter-Wisternitz) in what is now Czech Republic as evidence of the 'Nordic race'. The 'Germanic peoples' were idealised – by politics and archaeology alike – as down-to-earth, virtuous and heroic, and regarded as the essential core of Western culture, which encompassed large parts of Europe. From this, a claim to further settlement rights beyond the German Reich was derived. From the beginning of the Second World War, excavations were initiated behind front lines under the slogan of 'gaining lebensraum in the East'. Excavations were to uncover supposed Germanic traces in order to substantiate this claim. Targeted excavations, exhibitions and a plethora of reconstruction drawings were to underpin this ideological perspective and to be continuously forced on the broader population. In order to establish the ideology and support it with the methods of prehistory and early history, the discipline was massively expanded both at universities and in institutions for monument preservation in the National Socialist German Reich. After the so-called 'Anschluss' in March 1938, such expansion of monument preservation structures was pushed forward in the areas that now belonged to the German Reich.



Luftaufnahme der Gesamtbefunde (Foto Modellbau Riener)

Fig. 1: Aerial view of the archaeological findings on the roll call square of the former Gusen concentration camp  
© Modellbau Riener

In many cases, the excavations were carried out by National Socialist organisations, such as the two competing institutions, the SS Ancestral Heritage and (SS-Ahnenerbe) the Rosenberg Department (Federation of German Prehistory). Fifty-one such excavations took place in the former Austrian territory, or parts of Southern Moravia, which belonged to the Gau Lower Danube. Many archaeologists openly espousing National Socialist and anti-Semitic ideologies were members of the NSDAP and the SS and had close and excellent contacts with the inner circle of the NSDAP leadership. For the territory of the First Austrian Republic, called Ostmark (since May 1939), the protagonists were Oswald Menghin (1888–1973), Eduard Beninger (1897–1963) and Kurt Willvonseder (1903–1968), as well as Hertha Ladenbauer-Orel (1912–2009) and Josef Vockenhuber (1910–1950).

Oswald Menghin was initially an associate professor of prehistory at the University of Vienna from 1918, becoming a full professor in 1922. He was dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in 1928/29 and rector of the University of Vienna in 1935/36. From the beginning of his career, his Catholic-German nationalist worldview shaped his actions. He was a member of various racist and anti-Semitic associations, joined the NSDAP in 1940, and, together with like-minded colleagues, tried quite successfully to prevent the appointment of professors of Jewish faith or left-leaning conviction. He gave numerous racist and anti-Semitic lectures on 'The Jewish question' and published correspondingly. From March to the end of May 1938, he was Minister of State for Education in Arthur Seyß-Inquart's transitional cabinet and was responsible for the dismissal and expulsion of numerous teachers and students from

colleges and universities through his signatures. His archaeological research was often involved in National Socialist projects, including the excavation of the Late Bronze Age cemetery in Gusen. Menghin abdicated his responsibility by fleeing to Argentina. Eduard Beninger studied prehistory, Sanskrit, Indo-European studies and German studies in Vienna i. a. under Oswald Menghin from 1918 onwards and worked as a volunteer at the Natural History Museum Vienna while still a student. In 1928, he was appointed as research assistant and in 1938 he took over as head of the museum's prehistory department. During the Second World War, he became head of the NSDAP's cultural office in Slovakia. His studies focused explicitly on the 'German question'. He joined the NSDAP, which was banned at the time, during the Austrofascist dictatorship (1933/34–1938). On 1 May 1938, he was accepted into the NSDAP.

He was a member of the Federation of German History and the Rosenberg Office. After the end of the war, he was sentenced to three years imprisonment for 'violation of human dignity' and lost his position at the Natural History Museum Vienna.

Kurt Willvonseder was involved in archaeological monument preservation from the 1930s onwards, initially as so-called correspondent in 1932. Immediately after the 'Anschluss', he was commissioned to expand the Department of Prehistory at the Central Office for Monument Preservation (renamed the Institute for Monument Preservation in 1940) based on the German model. He acted as its interim head from September 1939 on. In January 1941, he became Gaupfleger (district curator) of archaeological monuments in the Reich districts of Niederdonau and Vienna. From autumn 1938, Willvonseder was an employee of the Forschungsgemeinschaft Deutsches Ahnenerbe (German Ancestral Heritage), an SS institution whose primary goal was to manifest National Socialist racial ideology through various investigations, including archaeological ones. He became an SS-Untersturmführer in January 1939, then an SS-Obersturmführer in 1941, and was accepted into the NSDAP the same year. In 1942, he was drafted into the Waffen-SS. He was keen to expand archaeological research in South-Eastern Europe, and in this capacity he worked in the Department of Monument Preservation of the Military Administration of Serbia in Belgrade on from November 1942. He was also active as an employee of the SS Ancestral Heritage in the former Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, in Slovakia and in South Tyrol. Willvonseder was arrested and interned after the end of

the war, but the proceedings against him at the People's Court were discontinued in 1948. From 1954 onwards, he was director of the Carolino Augusteum Museum in Salzburg.

As Willvonseder had been in Vienna during the Second World War only intermittently and therefore unable to perform his duties as curator of monuments, he was represented by Hertha Orel (married name Ladenbauer-Orel). She had completed her studies in Vienna under Oswald Menghin in December 1938 to work in the Institute for Monument Preservation as of autumn 1938. She was responsible for the entire range of

monument preservation. She conducted excavations during construction of the Reichsautobahn (today's Westautobahn), during construction of the Hermann-Göring-Werke in Linz (today's voestalpine) and the Late Bronze Age cemetery in Gusen, which was discovered during construction of the railway at the Gusen concentration camp. Not much is known about Josef Vockenhuber. He was born in 1910. He worked as an excavation technician and departmental restorer at the Central Office for Monument Protection (renamed the Institute for Monument Preservation in 1940). He died in 1950.



Fig. 2: Finds from the so-called 'Blutsickergrube' ('blood pit') at the crematorium of the former sub-camp in Melk  
© Claudia Theune

Kurt Willvonseder and Eduard Beninger, like Oswald Menghin, were staunch supporters of National Socialist and anti-Semitic ideologies and aligned their academic work with these goals.

Excavations from the Nazi era in the Gusen area mainly concern the medieval ruins of Spilberg Castle and the Late Bronze Age cemetery in Gusen. These and other excavation sites along the Reichsautobahn and in Linz were exploited for ideological purposes. The finds in Gusen, for example, were interpreted and idealised as evidence of a pre-Germanic culture.

The work at Spilberg Castle was conceived as protective measure. A large hostel for the Hitler Youth was to be built here. District administrator of Perg, Gustav Brachmann, took advantage of the concentration camp system and suggested that construction should take place in November 1940. The investigations continued until 1943, when two Roman grave stones from Lauriacum (now Enns-Lorch) were found in the medieval castle, where they had been reused (see article by Robert Hofstadler). Gustav Brachmann played a key role in the discovery and excavation of the Late Bronze Age cemetery in Gusen. During the construction of the railway, Brachmann discovered sherds and skeletal remains in the spoil in spring 1941. It was not until a year later that Oswald Menghin learned of the finds. He thereupon informed Kurt Willvonseder thereupon, who visited the site in May 1942 (see article by Antl-Weiser and Theune). Excavations began in September 1942 under local direction of Hertha Orel, with the assistance of excavation specialist Josef Vockenhuber, as Willvonseder was abroad. Around 12 detainees, including Kazimierz

Gelinek from Poland, who had received archaeological training (see article by Haunschmied), were involved in the practical archaeological excavations, documentation and processing. The excavations were given high priority, the finds were processed in the 'Jourhaus' and a museum was set up. A so-called commemorative book with drawings and plans was created for Heinrich Himmler. Furthermore, a 1943 calendar was designed and produced by the detainees (see article by Antl-Weiser and Theune).

The archaeological investigations carried out during the Nazi era in and around Gusen must be viewed in the context of ideologically instrumentalised excavations that took place in many places throughout the German Reich. This applies to the interpretation of excavations as evidence of the Reich's own (Germanic or German) past, yet also to the use of forced labour by detainees for archaeological purposes.

#### Excavations at crime scenes of the Nazi era

Especially since the 1980s, contemporary historians have been engaged in coming to terms with the Nazi era and researching National Socialist dictatorship. Archaeological excavations at Nazi crime scenes such as former concentration camps, forced labour camps, prisoner-of-war camps and extermination sites have been carried out since around 1990 - initially in what is now Poland and Germany, and also in Austria since 2001. Archaeological investigations brought about realisations of the sheer amount of material remains in former camps, accommodation barracks, killing facilities and work sites, still sitting just below the earth's surface. Thus excavations bring the foundations and

camp structures of the forced labour camps to light, serving as reminders of the system of oppression and the suffering of untold detainees. The finds provide deeper insight into the conditions of detainment and the physical and psychological terror in the camps.

Research on the Nazi era in various disciplines has shown that different types of sources, such as the innumerable, highly diverse text documents, eyewitness accounts, material remains and vast amounts of pictorial documents each have their own revelatory potential, shedding light on specific facets of the camp system. A picture obtained of the past in such way therefore becomes more reliable.

It should be noted that objects were often mentioned only in passing in word-based accounts of contemporary witnesses. Attestations of traumatic experiences remained dominant. Archaeological objects provide different insights into the camps and can reveal a great deal about coping with living conditions and survival strategies. This gives different perspectives and provides insights into personal experiences, of events and the structure of the Nazi dictatorship. Archaeological investigations are formally and legally enshrined in the Austrian Monument Protection Act, without limitations regarding any epochs. The area of responsibilities covers archaeological monuments that are several hundred years old, as well as sites from the modern era and the 19th and 20th centuries, including the Nazi period. Official supervision of excavations and the listing of former camp sites are among the responsibilities of the Federal Monuments Authority Austria.



Fig. 3: Toothbrush from the former Gunskirchen sub-camp  
© Collections of the Mauthausen Memorial OS1190

The first excavation in Austria took place in 2001 at the Nazi euthanasia killing centre in Hartheim (Upper Austria), where several thousands of personal belongings of murdered victims were found in a number of pits. These items had been disposed of and buried there during the dismantling of the killing centre in the winter of 1944/45. Excavations followed in Mauthausen in 2002, when SS workshop barracks were uncovered during the redesign of the memorial site and the construction of the visitors' centre. Further archaeological investigations were carried out in Hartheim, Mauthausen and several sub-camps such as Gusen (Fig. 1), Loibl-Nord, Gunskirchen, Melk (Fig. 2) as well as in prisoner-of-war camps and forced labour camps. As a rule, archaeological building research is carried out alongside excavations, providing valuable insights into the history of buildings still standing and the structural changes they underwent during and after the Nazi era. Further engagements, such as surveys and inventory lists of victim sites in present-day Austria and the listing of former camp sites as protected, as well as geophysical prospecting demonstrate significant commitments and advances in the discipline.

Large-scale excavations reveal fences, foundations and interior structures of the buildings. Rubbish pits were uncovered, containing an endless array of objects that were disposed of during the camps' operation and in the post-war period. Evaluations seldomly reveal a specific individual's fate. Only occasionally are

objects found that can be linked to respective individuals. However, finds such as homemade shoes or carefully mended clothes show that detainees tried to protect themselves from the forces of nature as best they could with the few resources they had. Clothes and shoes have been preserved in various shapes and sizes, including children's sizes. Spoons are very common among the finds. Owning a spoon was essential in order to be able to eat at all. There are also many homemade or modified spoons made from easily modified materials. E. g. a hole in the handle was typical, so the spoon could be carried around easily. There are examples of secretly manufactured knives, the possession of which was prohibited. Modifications to tableware, e. g. a sieve made from a bowl, were intended to improve the nutritional situation, however minimally. Toothbrushes (Fig. 3) and combs illustrate the desire to maintain a level of hygiene. While these items demonstrate agency to ensure physical survival, other objects bear witness to coping on a mental level. These may be game pieces for playing with fellow detainees and providing some distraction. There are also dolls in the memorial collections, which show that children were detained in concentration camps, showing how adults cared for children. A small wooden heart may have kept the memory of loved ones alive. Drawings and caricatures illustrate artistic processing of detainment. Writing one's own name or at least one's initials was very important. In this way, detainees

reassured themselves of their identity and resisted dehumanisation and reduction to a number given to them by the SS. Sometimes objects, e.g. batons, clearly point to perpetrators. With regard to victim groups, religious symbols such as Stars of David and Crucifixes suggest religious belief. Clothes may indicate gender or age; children's clothes, in particular. Strap garters indicate the presence of women. Company logos on objects give us an insight into the victims' regions of origin. In Mauthausen, for example, there are numerous objects with markings from Hungarian companies. Coins from different European countries can also be interpreted in this way. Another group of victims that we can identify through objects are political victims. Some objects bear clear political messages that openly testify to resistance against the National Socialist regime. Excavations at former Nazi crime scenes provide opportunities to examine the inhumane system of the Nazi Zwangslager 'from the perspective of the objects'. Even though only few finds can be attributed to specific detainees, the finds show that there were select opportunities for detainees to take action in attempts to increase their chance of survival. The finds furthermore provide clues of the victims' origins. In some cases, religious or political backgrounds can be assumed. An archaeology of the Nazi era from different perspectives provides insights into the racist ideology in which archaeology played an eminent role.

This apparently legitimised the National Socialist policy of exclusion and justified the humiliation, terrorisation and killing of others. Today's excavations in the Zwangslager reveal these atrocities, but also the detainees' attempts to maintain their will to survive.

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