

Comment on the GfA's position on the skeletal finds from Malbork (Marienburg)

According to press reports, a mass grave was discovered in the fall of 2008 during the course of construction work in the city of Malbork, once known as the German Marienburg. The Volkbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (VDK), an organization dedicated to the protection and care of the remains and graves of German citizens who died or fell during wartime, indicated that 2116 skeletons belonging to 1001 women, 381 men, and 377 children, as well as another 300 individuals whose age and sex were no longer determinable were recovered. The remains of these people, most probably German civilians who lost their lives in 1945, were interred on August 14, 2009 at the German war cemetery Neumark near Stettin (Szczecin).

Following a review of the available and somewhat contradictory reports regarding the examination of the finds, the Society for Anthropology (Gesellschaft für anthropologie, GfA) sees itself obliged to answer a number of posing questions that remain open. It remains unclear whether origin, and cause and time of death of the victims were addressed by those performing the examination, which was ordered by the Polish Institut für Nationales Gedenken (IPN). The reports, for example, do not indicate to what extent experts in the field of forensic science were involved in the examination process.

The GfA, whose members include leading experts in the fields of osteology, archaeology, and forensic anthropology, has made an effort to make contact with the Polish authorities responsible for dealing with such situations and also the VDK, however, an exchange of information did not materialize.

The GfA board is of the opinion that the examination of such finds should be conducted according to current and accepted scientific criteria as used in anthropology and related fields of inquiry. Anthropology as a discipline offers the necessary tools and knowledge requisite for working on such finds. In addition to standard information regarding age, sex and health status, experts in this field are also capable of providing evidence for cause and time of death. The GfA, which is a scientific society composed of anthropologists and researchers affiliated with universities throughout Europe, offers its cooperation for such cases in the future.

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