

# Renationalizing bodies? The French search mission for the corpses of deportees in Germany, 1946–58<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Corpses are not a research subject that a historian would normally choose, and less still corpses en masse. Whether approaches to mass violence are of political, social or cultural history, the historical analysis of societies tends to focus on the living, and corpses are discussed only in terms of a social group's structure in relation to death, the social definition of which can be addressed only through a detailed cultural history.<sup>2</sup> While the study of funerary rites has always been central in anthropology for example, this has not often been the case in history. Important changes have taken place over the last thirty years or so in the historiography of the First World War, and research now focuses more closely on the fallen soldiers and the place that European societies have tried to give them. Through pioneering studies on war memorials,<sup>3</sup> war cemeteries, new funerary rites and negotiations over the fate of bodies by states, armies and families, this new history of war has illustrated a history of mourning in the context of the mass deaths of soldiers.<sup>4</sup> Other studies have discussed the presence of corpses in towns on the front line – towns with infirmaries where the wounded had become a part of the social fabric and often the dead as well.<sup>5</sup> In such a vigorous historiography of the European war (the international dimension of the First World War is often neglected in this context), bodies are seen as wounded, broken and reconstructed.

The study of French soldiers with facial injuries was greatly influential in this new relationship with the body; however, these corpses were still not seen as independent social agents.<sup>6</sup> In more general terms, the history of military and wartime medicine has undergone changes due to extensive research on the *body*, in which is seen a field of social forces and representations.

Interestingly, such studies have not yet addressed the Second World War, which had a much higher percentage of civilian deaths. It would appear that research into the Holocaust has avoided paying much attention to the millions of dead bodies that resulted.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, the limited research on the place of the corpse in mass violence and wars has had little impact on the historical analysis of genocide. There again, the body is only briefly addressed, often in discussions on methods of killing. The Holocaust is almost an exception, with detailed, but limited, research on gas chambers, crematoria and, more recently, the organization and techniques used by the mobile death squads in eastern Europe, the *Einsatzgruppen*.<sup>8</sup> Historical research could gain much, however, by considering mass corpses and by studying accounts and sources in order to define the sequence of events that led to the specific treatment of the body at the time of massacre and after. A description of the search and identification processes for corpses could thus contribute to social history, cultural history and the history of medicine. A historiographical approach would demonstrate the administrative structures involved in the treatment of corpses en masse, as well as the structures of power and reappropriation in a context in which the bodies are seen as objects that were subject to ancient or modern techniques originating from other conflicts, from local traditions or even those newly developed. It therefore seems clear that historical research on the memory of mass killings and genocides – research that has increased over the last few decades – would gain much by shifting its focus from monuments and representations (particularly in cultural studies) to the actual sites of the massacres and mass graves. An approach based on individual biographies or cohorts (social sub-groups or groups defined by age) could be used here by historians. A biographical approach from the point of view of the persecutors or the victims or even from the point of view of those responsible for the exhumations and memorials is also a method that a historian could use. Furthermore, specific attention to the chronology and the sequencing of events would be beneficial for studies of corpses in mass violence and genocides.

In order to illustrate the possibilities outlined above for the development of a history of social and political practices related to corpses en masse, I shall discuss the work of the French search mission in Germany, a body that was active from 1946 to 1958 and that was under the charge of the Ministry of War Veterans, Deportees and War Victims.<sup>9</sup> To illustrate the potential of research into the role of the body in – and after – situations of mass violence and genocide, we address two specific aspects: first, the diplomatic dimension of the negotiations that led to the French search mission being given authorization to work on German soil; and second, in greater detail, the use of physical anthropology and forensics in identifying the bodies of French deportees buried in individual and mass graves.

### **Negotiating diplomatic status**

For over ten years the French search mission devoted considerable resources and major financial investments to strengthening its forensics techniques, earthmoving equipment and identification capacity; however, it also needed the support and commitment of diplomats, deportee organizations and the families of those missing. During this time in Germany, a group of French civil servants systematically searched the concentration camps in the Reich and exhumed tens of thousands of corpses and skeletons in order to try to identify French deportees (or rather, deportees from France). Other countries, such as Belgium, Italy and Denmark, organized similar search missions.<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting, however, that, to our knowledge, no mention has been made of the French mission in any of the many books or papers on the subject of the memory of the Holocaust or the consequences of deportation from France. This historiographic silence is interesting in itself, and perhaps implies a certain disembodiment in the accounts of the concentration camps, which tend to focus on the stories of the survivors and to neglect the material aspects of the political treatment of the dead.<sup>11</sup>

Current portrayals of deportation, whether they address racial deportees or resistance fighters, render the body abstract and simply depict the fires in the crematoria of the concentration camps and death camps. Of course, the concentration camp system and the Nazi genocidal system (which it is worth making a distinction between) both required crematoria to be built on a large scale, the most famous of which were those at Birkenau (Auschwitz II).<sup>12</sup>

Some of the deportees' bodies were not incinerated, however, particularly in the final months of the war, due to the increase in the number of deaths and the absence of fuel (wood or coal) for the incinerators. The bodies were then buried in mass graves, either near to the camp or *kommando*,<sup>13</sup> or in the municipal cemeteries or Jewish cemeteries in the neighbouring villages.<sup>14</sup> The prisoners who survived until the concentration camp system was dismantled were then taken on forced 'death marches', in which they were evacuated by foot along the roads of the Reich. Those who fell were shot dead by the SS, and a large number of them died of exhaustion. Their bodies were abandoned on the roadsides or buried quickly and anonymously by local communities.<sup>15</sup>

The liberation of the concentration camps and the occupation of Germany were followed by major search operations for survivors, and estimations of the number of foreigners who had died in the Reich. On 10 December 1945, General Koenig passed an ordinance in the French zone of occupation obliging German municipalities to draw up a list of all the deceased citizens of the allied nations, providing all available details of their names, nationalities and the circumstances of their deaths. Similar statutes were passed in the British and American zones.<sup>16</sup> In the French zone, by the summer of 1946, out of a total of 5,200 communes, 5,090 had provided documents, including 3,959 legal records, 4,600 death certificates and details of 3,982 graves that had been identified. Similar figures were produced in the British and American zones.

The French search mission was under the charge of the Civil Tracing Service for Deportees at the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs. This service was charged with establishing the identities of the survivors and the dead, producing various lists and collating information. From October 1946, changes were made and it was decided that the bodies of French deportees found in the Reich (including those in the Soviet zone of occupation) could be brought back to France, to be buried in the cemetery of the families' choice.<sup>17</sup> Discussions were largely concerned with the material conditions of repatriation (it was difficult to provide real coffins for all the bodies; however, large numbers of shrouds were available as well as sixteen trucks and ten cars), and the bodies that were identified were all brought to Strasbourg before being sent to different towns in France. Deportee associations were already very active at the time and followed the operations closely. They protested regularly at the Ministry; they particularly wanted the families who desired it to be able to be present during the exhumations, but the

civil servants tried to avoid this because of the emotion that the exhumations incited, as the bodies were usually found in mass graves. Repatriation took place only on the specific request of the family of the deceased.<sup>18</sup> When the body of a French deportee was identified and no request had been made by the family for repatriation, it was inhumed at a French burial section of the camp site. These sections had been designed according to a military model, and the diplomats in charge of them often had to fight to prevent changes being made to the sites so that their 'French character' could be preserved. A certain 'extraterritoriality' was – and still is today – symbolized by this strict delimitation of the French section and the presence of the French flag.

Towards the end of 1947, the civil servants working for the search mission in Germany lost their military status. With the creation of the Anglo-American bizon, followed by the trizone and finally the Federal Republic, the mission's activities were regrouped into one location, initially Bad Elms and later Bad Neuenahr. The negotiations on the self-government agreement for the Federal Republic of Germany forced it to rethink and to give the French search mission an official status, which led to the signing of the diplomatic Franco-German agreement on 23 October 1954.<sup>19</sup> The negotiations were not concluded for many years, however, and as long as the German state was considered non-existent as a result of the collapse of the Reich in April and May 1945 (as there was no longer a legitimate government) the occupying forces were sovereign in the conquered territory within the limits of the international treaties,<sup>20</sup> particularly the Hague Conventions, and had the right to exhume. Negotiations over access to the sites of the assassinations were in fact held between the Allies, in which the French search mission needed to gain the right to work in the Soviet, British and American zones.

The creation of the Federal Republic of Germany on 23 May 1949 marked a change in legal approach: the French mission, which had up to then an undefined interim status, now found itself in a territory that was regaining a part of its sovereignty. However, the Federal Republic was still under the Occupation Statute, which was to be renegotiated, and the possibility of a peace agreement being reached was becoming rapidly less likely with the definitive partition of Germany. The negotiation of the country's sovereignty (in German, the 'transition treaty') continued up until October 1954. In view of the signing of the treaty, the French authorities brought the question of the small search mission to the negotiating table, fearing that its activity would be stopped for legal reasons.

On 3 September 1953, André François-Poncet, the High Commissioner in Bonn, wrote to the Ministry of War Veterans and War Victims in Paris, more precisely to the Office of War Graves in the Department of Civil Status, to suggest that negotiations be opened up with the Germans in order to determine the definitive status of the search mission.<sup>21</sup> The Ministry of War Veterans was reluctant to open negotiations, but the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs insisted. The *Auswärtiges Amt* – its German counterpart – had already made contact with the embassy to request that discussions were opened regarding German war graves in France. The Germans considered these negotiations to be a reciprocal act, however, and this created difficulties: ‘We must avoid considering in terms of reciprocity a matter that is only a problem for us because of the atrocities carried out by the Germans. It is their duty not to make matters worse through any more or less voluntary negligence in preserving the memory of the deceased’, wrote Jean Sauvagnargues, the Director of the European desk at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 1 December 1953.<sup>22</sup> While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wanted to negotiate, however, the Department of Civil Status at the Ministry of War Veterans was very distrustful of the Germans, as the conservation of the concentration camps and *kommandos* (for memorial purposes), for example, had encountered a number of problems.<sup>23</sup> The local German authorities were embarking on work during this reconstruction period that threatened the integrity of the concentration camps and mass graves. This was an observation that was often made by delegations of survivors or families of the deceased when they visited. The problem was that, up until then, it was the Treaty of Versailles that had been applied in terms of the maintenance of war graves; however, the graves of the deportees were not – or not yet – considered such, and negotiations were aimed at having this redefinition accepted by the Germans. However, the legal positioning of National Socialism meant that the German diplomats considered the deportees as non-regular combatants. According to the Treaty of Versailles, each country should cover the costs of the maintenance of enemy graves on their own territory. France thus spent 82 million francs regrouping and maintaining German graves, but the costs of identifying and regrouping the deportees’ bodies in Germany had up until then been covered by France. The search mission remained French but now that it was under the authority of the embassy in Bonn it obtained diplomatic status and the searches received a budgetary allocation from the German federal state.

Negotiations were concluded at the end of May 1954. The Germans had accepted almost all of the French stipulations and two draft conventions had been drawn up, one on 'the consequences of deportation' and the other on German war graves in France.<sup>24</sup> The conventions were to be signed in June 1954. The European desk of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was delighted with this, as these agreements were likely to ease Franco-German relations: safeguarding the integrity of the concentration camps and the question of German graves in France had created tension on both sides of the Rhine. Germany had also initiated negotiations on the question of graves with a dozen other countries, including Egypt.

Once the text of the convention on the consequences of deportation had been drawn up, the contents of the annexes still needed to be negotiated. They were to address three points: the sum to be paid by the Federal Republic of Germany; the list of exhumations still to be carried out (4,000 were planned); and the list of the 'main sites' of deportation and the erection or maintenance of monuments. The delegations met in Bonn at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 10 June 1954. Discussions were tense, but the embassy reported to Paris that the Germans were acting with goodwill.<sup>25</sup>

The agreement was finally signed in Paris by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer on 23 October 1954,<sup>26</sup> and by the Chancellor and Pierre Mendès-France (who at the time was both President of the Cabinet and Minister of Foreign Affairs) during the Franco-German meetings that followed the Nine-Power Conference in Paris on the western military alliance. That day also, the four occupying forces signed an agreement resolving the main problems in Germany (the occupation troops were to remain, but the country was to be granted its full independence), and the Federal Republic of Germany signed a treaty allowing it to join NATO, as well as a convention on cultural exchanges between Germany and France, allowing for student and university trips and the support of language learning.

The French mission's work extended to the whole of the German Federal Republic and, without any particular difficulties, to the German Democratic Republic as well. The Soviet authorities in East Berlin were very helpful in this up until the uprising on 17 June 1953. From this date onwards, exhumations were no longer authorized in the German Democratic Republic.<sup>27</sup> To our knowledge, the search mission did not work outside of these areas, and therefore not in Poland, where Auschwitz and its many *kommandos* were located, and where the death marches involving the highest number of deportees had taken place.

### Identifying bodies

How were the exhumations carried out? Initially, documents and survivors' accounts were compiled and compared, and a list of sites to be searched was submitted to the local German authorities. Earth-moving equipment was then transported to the sites (the labourers themselves were German), and sometimes tents were set up to shelter the tables on which the remains were spread. The skeletons were first reassembled at the site itself, and the remains were then transported by truck to the mission's headquarters. The cars used by the French civil servants had diplomatic licence plates (we do not know whether this was also the case for the trucks). At the headquarters the skeletons were photographed and studied in more detail. Up to 1,500 skeletons were stored in the mission's basements. The bodies that were identified as not being 'French' were then either passed on to other search missions (the missions sometimes exchanged remains) or reburied in the same place. From the mass of remains exhumed, relatively few bodies were repatriated. The people in charge of exhuming the bodies were sometimes simply looking for just one body that had been buried at the side of the road after a death march, or at other times opened up enormous mass graves such as that at Vaihingen, which had been a 'hospital' camp for the *kommandos* of the Neckar valley and a terrible death camp for sick deportees. 'In Vaihingen itself, where we identified 270 French bodies, 29 Dutch, 14 Belgian, 13 Norwegian and 18 Italian, the systematic opening of graves began in March 1954', stated an official report by the search mission in April 1955. 'Operations came to an end in September, at which time 1,488 bodies had been exhumed from a total of thirteen graves. The large number of corpses that the majority of the graves contained (one of them had up to 231 bodies) was not an obstacle to identification.'<sup>28</sup> The grave that was opened at Allach, near Dachau, revealed thousands of bodies as well. The search mission handled almost 10,000 corpses there. At Bergen-Belsen, which was the last stage of this major mission, they expected to exhume at least 12,000 bodies. However, at the last minute the exhumations were halted because of protests by the camp's Jewish survivors, who considered the mission's work a desacralization of Jewish graves.<sup>29</sup> These were the most significant protests, but other conflicts had also previously occurred, such as at Donauwörth, where the inhabitants of the nearest village had made complaints that the French civil servants were disturbing the dead. On a few occasions, such as at Ratisbonne in 1960, work took place



in the town's cemetery, where the dead deportees from the local *kommando* had been buried in a communal grave.

In order to be able to identify the thousands of dead, the search mission had to use forensics. In October 1953, a delegation of some of the most important French anthropologists and forensic scientists carried out an inspection at one of the exhumation sites. Doctors Vallois, Piédelièvre, Mallet and Garlopeau went to Kochendorf, in the Neckar valley.<sup>30</sup> At the time, René Piédelièvre was the director of the Paris Forensics Institute<sup>31</sup> (l'Institut médico-légal de Paris) and Henri-Victor Vallois was a professor of physical anthropology at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.<sup>32</sup> As no archives had been found for the *kommando* at Kochendorf, the bodies were identified solely using forms that had been completed by the families. They included an identity photograph of the deportee, a detailed description (height, weight, etc.), details of any distinctive features (past fractures, for example) and dental treatments, filled in by the deceased's former dentist.<sup>33</sup> The doctors reported that at Kochendorf the ground was first surveyed in great detail in order to accurately mark out the limits of the grave. Siliceous clay had not yet entered into the bone structures and so the remains were well preserved. The German technicians then used archaeological methods to remove the earth with a brush so that it slowly revealed the bones. 'The labourers generally begin at the extremities of the bodies with the phalanges, metacarpals, then carpals for the hands, and the phalanges, metatarsals, then tarsals for the feet' wrote the inspectors.<sup>34</sup>

Each skeleton had to be reassembled in order to determine the history of each body and age at the time of death. Specialist German doctors, whose names were not specified, were in charge of this job.<sup>35</sup> Each skull and jaw was photographed using a special camera, as well as 'any bones that had distinctive lesions, past fractures or acquired bone lesions'.<sup>36</sup> If any doubt remained in identifying a particular body, further information was requested from the deportee's likely family. If the body had not been specifically requested, the remains were collected in a plastic bag, which was then placed in a small individual coffin in order to allow for later identification if a subsequent request was received from the family.

The mission's forensic experts provided some feedback in order to improve the procedures. In particular, they suggested that photographs be taken during the course of the exhumations and that any hairs that were found should be analysed. They also asked that skull measurements be taken more systematically and that X-rays be used.

In their report, the four doctors tried to connect the mission's forensic work (looking for bodies) with the traditional work of French forensic scientists; surely the sheer number of bodies studied should allow for certain hypotheses and work methods to be approved or rejected? This was the case for the determination of age and sex. 'The methods used on thousands of skeletons have shown that skeletons usually evolve with age. We believe that this was not very widely known up until now, and that outside of all pathological evolution, an ageing of the bone structure can also be identified' they wrote.<sup>37</sup> They concluded by saying that the archaeological methods used for the exhumations in Germany had never been used in France and that they recommended 'importing' it. On this occasion they recommended that German methods be adopted in France and also that French methods be adopted in Germany.

The search mission thus used traditional forensic identification techniques, their only 'originality' being the extent of their work, which covered thousands of bodies. The German forensic scientist whose work was observed at Kochendorf, for example, was responsible for over 3,500 corpses. In 1957, the mission had exhumed and examined around 50,000 bodies, 7,000 of which had been identified as French (or deportees from France); 4,000 of these 7,000 bodies were repatriated back to France and the others were buried in the French section of the camps. The statistics provided by the mission indicated a high percentage of identification: in Binau, 91 per cent of the French deportees who were searched for were identified; in Haslach 81 per cent; and in Vaihingen 77 per cent.

The search mission demonstrated a clear continuity of military practices in the treatment of the bodies. Following the First World War, in order to respond to the high numbers of requests by families and war veterans' associations, a law was passed to allow the bodies buried in the battlefields to be exhumed. This vast undertaking in Germany was thus in accordance with the law of 31 July 1920 which ordained that the bodies of fallen soldiers be repatriated to family cemeteries at the expense of the state. During the period in question, the mission principally sought to identify the bodies of political deportees and resistance fighters, but in application of the strict post-war memorial policy, which refused any distinctions between political and racial deportees (with the exception of pensions, which were higher for political deportees), the families of the Jewish deportees were also able to benefit from the law. Research was nonetheless limited to the new borders of the two Germanys following the Potsdam conference, and the six Nazi death camps

installed in Poland remained outside the mission's jurisdiction. Two aspects of the mission's work are of special interest here: first, the sorting of bodies represented a huge undertaking; and second, only the bodies of French deportees (even if it was a question of Jews or foreign resistance fighters) were searched for and were subject to identification procedures. The 'inappropriate' bodies – those of other deportees – did not interest the mission. Furthermore, one of its main concerns was to ensure that it did not repatriate 'inappropriate' French bodies, in other words those of voluntary workers in Germany and above all collaborators who took refuge in the Reich at the end of the war and died there. As their remains were buried in Frohnau cemetery in Berlin, the people in charge of the digs in the cemetery were particularly careful to ensure that the bodies of the deportees were not confused with or, worse still, mixed up with those of people considered traitors to the nation.

The search mission was dismantled slowly from 1956 onwards. The last exhumations were to take place in Bergen-Belsen and were planned to be on a massive scale, considering the specific history of the camp (over 20,000 inmates had died there in the weeks before and after the liberation). Even before they started, the exhumations were contested by the central organization of Jews in Germany and by the body of Bergen-Belsen survivors. It provoked a long controversy between the French authorities and the French deportees' organizations on one side, and the German government and Jewish organizations from all over the world on the other. Exhumations in Bergen-Belsen consequently never took place, following a decision from an international arbitration commission.<sup>38</sup>

The work of the search mission came to an end because the demands for exhumations ceased to be lodged and the endeavour was considered as finished by the French Ministry of War Veterans and the deportees' organizations.

The French search mission first worked under the framework of a military occupation, and this role remained unchanged till it was dismantled. But in the twelve years of its existence, French–German relations tremendously evolved. From arch-enemies, the two nations started a slow but very significant redefinition of their relationship, towards friendship, reconciliation and then a strong alliance, an alliance formally established in Paris in January 1963. However, the search mission did not play a significant role in this coming to terms with centuries of war and conflict. It was seen by the French only as a precondition for further negotiations and this was constantly repeated by diplomats. But the very activities of the

mission – the exhumations – were not given much publicity beyond the circles of deportees and their families. The reconciliation process was built far more on silence over deportation and the Holocaust, or at least on a narrative of common resistance to National Socialism that had taken place in the concentration camps.

The search mission was an undertaking that involved re-nationalizing corpses, but it did not have solely nationalistic aims: it also allowed for the reprivatization of the bodies. The families who were waiting for them to be returned were aware of what was at stake. Thus the Duchess of Ayen, whose husband, Jean de Noailles d'Ayen, had been deported to Germany and died in Bergen-Belsen on 13 April 1945, wrote on the subject of the search mission to Maurice Couve de Murville, who had just been appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. She said the mission's work was 'admirably conducted and carried out and had already proven its moral efficiency (without mentioning its scientific expertise), with the final aim being – far from desecrating the remains – to return those who died for their country to the grave that they deserved, a grave that would preserve their identity with the memory of their sacrifice ... all things that the Nazi camps had wanted to abolish'.<sup>39</sup>

## Notes

- 1 The text of this chapter was translated from the author's French by Cadenza Academic Translations.
- 2 See the numerous studies on the Middle Ages and modern times, such as J. Delumeau, *Une histoire du paradis* (Paris: Fayard, 1992); P. Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1977); P. Ariès, *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident: du Moyen-Âge à nos jours* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1975).
- 3 See for example A. Prost, 'Les monuments aux morts. Cultes républicains? Culte civique? Culte patriotique?', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, Quarto, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 199–223.
- 4 There is a wealth of literature on the subject, for example J.-J. Becker, 'L'évolution de l'historiographie de la Première Guerre mondiale', *Revue Historique des Armées*, 242 (2006) (special issue, 1916, *les grandes batailles et la fin de la guerre européenne*), pp. 4–15; A. Prost & J. Winter, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 5 See in particular the work of Roger Chickering on the town of Freiburg/Breisgau, in the Grand Duchy of Baden (Germany): R. Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

- 6 S. Delaporte, *Les Gueules cassées: les blessés de la face de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Editions Noësis, 1996); A. Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 7 On the subject of mourning rituals in France during the Second World War, see nonetheless: D. Voldman & L. Capdevila, *Nos morts: les sociétés occidentales face aux tués de la guerre, XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Payot, 2002).
- 8 H. Krausnick, *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen: die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges, 1938–1942* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1985); H. C. Earl, *The Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial, 1945–1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 9 The mission's research activities have been very briefly discussed in J.-M. Dreyfus, 'Conflits de mémoires autour du cimetière de Bergen-Belsen', *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'Histoire*, 90 (2006), pp. 73–87; that article was reprinted in M.-B. Vincent (ed.), *La Dénazification* (Paris: Perrin, 2008), pp. 235–57.
- 10 For more on the Danish search mission, see S. A. Birkeland, *I krigens kolvand* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2009).
- 11 The research for this chapter was mainly carried out using the archives at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The files concerning the search mission were from a range of sources from different French diplomatic posts in the Federal Republic of Germany. I completed my research by reading a few files from the Auswärtiges Amt, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly those relating to the Franco-German Convention on 'the consequences of deportation' in 1954. I also used an inspection report by French forensic scientists, published in the *Bulletin de l'Académie de Médecine* (1955, no. 16).
- 12 The most comprehensive study of the crematoria of Auschwitz is the remarkable book by Robert Jan van Pelt which discusses the case for the defence in the Irving trial: R. J. van Pelt, *The Case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving Trial* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
- 13 A *kommando* was, in the vocabulary of concentration camps, a 'sub-camp' that was an offspring of a larger camp.
- 14 See, for example, the case of Echterdingen, a *kommando* of Struthof-Natzwiller, who was located on the German bank of the Rhine. J.-M. Dreyfus, 'Echterdingen', in G. Megargee (ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), vol. 1, pp. 1027–8, at p. 1027. The bodies were buried in the forest near the *kommando*.
- 15 On the death marches, see the book by Daniel Blatman, *Les Marches de la mort: la dernière étape du génocide nazi, été 1944–printemps 1945* (Paris: Fayard, 2009); and also the beautiful book by Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999 – original edition 1957), p. 220.
- 16 For the British zone, the decree dates to 29 January 1946.

- 17 See the preparation meetings for the first repatriations in Archives nationales, Paris, F9 3843.
- 18 The letters that were sent together with the administrative forms were evidently very emotional and moving as they retraced the events in the life of a young resistance fighter or member of a Jewish family in a very concise manner.
- 19 Franco-German Convention on 'the consequences of deportation', signed by Pierre Mendès-France and Konrad Adenauer on 23 October 1954 in Paris.
- 20 There is insufficient research on the status of corpses (and exhumations) in international law.
- 21 Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes (henceforth CADN), Embassy of Bonn, no. 20, Dispatch by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Department – Central Europe Division at the embassy of Bad Godesberg, regarding the problems of maintenance of civil and military war graves after the contractual agreements came into force on 1 December 1953.
- 22 Jean Sauvagnargues, 1915–2002. A former student at the École Normale Supérieure, and member of the Foreign Office, Sauvagnargues joined France Libre in 1943. He was a member of Général de Gaulle's cabinet during the Liberation, Director of German and Austrian Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1955 during Antoine Pinay's second government, then ambassador in Ethiopia and Tunisia. He was ambassador in Bonn from 1970 to 1974, and then Minister of Foreign Affairs for Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's first government.
- 23 CADN, Embassy of Bonn, no. 20, Letter from the Ministry of War Veterans and War Victims, Office of War Graves, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Central Europe Division, 22 October 1953. See also the minutes of the preparatory meeting in Bonn, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PAAA; Political Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Berlin, B86 1372, Aktenvermerk, Betr. Ausländische Krieggräber in Deutschland, Exhumierung von ausländischen Kriegstoten, 21 August 1953, meeting of 29 October 1953.
- 24 CADN, Embassy of Bonn, no. 20, Letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Central Europe Division, Jean Sauvagnargues to High Commissioner, ambassador, 31 May 1954.
- 25 CADN, Embassy of Bonn, no. 20, Dispatch no. 1243 concerning Franco-German negotiations on some of the problems resulting from deportation and regarding the maintenance of German military graves in France, 10 June 1954. It should be noted that the correspondence exchanged between Paris and Bonn on the subject of the agreement was copied from this date onwards to the Minister's Office, which remained Georges Bidault's office for two more days. On 14 June, Pierre Mendès-France, who had become President of the Council, took over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 26 In his memoirs, Adenauer provides not more than a list of treaties and agreements signed on that day, including the Convention on 'the

- consequences of deportation': K. Adenauer, *Erinerungen 1953–1955* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), p. 382.
- 27 See the negotiations on this subject: CADN, Embassy of Bonn, no. 28.
- 28 CADN, Embassy of Bonn, no. 20, Letter no. 52349, Ministry of War Veterans to the High Commissioner, 26 April 1955, pp. 7–9.
- 29 On this debate, which lasted for over ten years and which was finally decided by a diplomatic arbitration committee, see Dreyfus, 'Conflits de mémoires'.
- 30 This mission resulted in a detailed scientific report and a large number of photographs. It was also the subject of a statement to the Academy of Medicine, and the subsequent publication of an article: H. V. Vallois, R. Piédélièvre, P. Mallet & S. Garlopeau, 'Données anthropologiques et médico-légales concernant l'identification des squelettes', *Bulletin de l'Académie Nationale de Médecine*, 119:3 (1955), pp. 67–80.
- 31 René Piédélièvre wrote a memoir: R. Piédélièvre, *Souvenirs d'un médecin légiste* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966).
- 32 On Vallois' activity see Y. Coppens, 'Le professeur Henri-Victor Vallois, anthropologue et paléoanthropologue', *Bulletin et Mémoire de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, 9:9–2 (1982), pp. 103–7.
- 33 I consulted the copies of 254 forms provided for exhumation requests in Bergen-Belsen and I was struck by the scarcity of information. For example, very few of the forms had been completed by dentists.
- 34 Vallois *et al.*, 'Données anthropologiques', p. 68.
- 35 Were these doctors trained in forensic medicine under the Nazi regime?
- 36 Vallois *et al.*, 'Données anthropologiques', p. 68.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 38 See a description of the controversy that was finally closed in 1969 in J.-M. Dreyfus, 'Conflits de mémoires'.
- 39 Archives at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, La Courneuve, Minister's Office, Maurice Couve de Murville, no. 296, Letter dated 29 May 1958.

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