

# The handling of bodies at the Drancy camp (1941–44): from legal procedures to collective forgetting

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## Abstract

This article seeks to show that the bodies of Jewish people who died in the Drancy internment camp between 1941 and 1944 were handled on French soil in a doubly normalised manner: first by the police and judicial system, and then in relation to funeral arrangements. My findings thus contradict two preconceived ideas that have become firmly established in collective memory: first, the belief that the number who died in the Drancy camp is difficult to establish; and second, the belief that the remains of internees who died in the camp were subjected to rapid and anonymous burial in a large mass grave in Drancy municipal cemetery.

**Key words:** Drancy, Holocaust, Jews, corpses, funerals, cemetery

## Introduction

Because the bodies of the dead internees of Drancy camp were handled by the police as well as administrative and even religious authorities, it has been possible to trace what happened to them. My research is based on the camp archives, French police and judicial archives, and burial records for the Paris cemeteries, which have made it possible to trace how deaths inside the camp were handled. The few witness accounts touching on this area are too fragmentary. Interviews with the remaining survivors from the period or with the descendants of buried internees are unable to shed light on the issue, primarily because the former were very young during their internment, and because the latter were in hiding when their family members were buried. The specific archival sources upon which I have drawn are:

- both individual internment files and transfer records from Drancy, which report those entering, leaving and dying in the camp from September 1942 onwards, and are now deposited at the French National Archives with a digital copy at the Centre de documentation juive contemporaine (Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center, CDJC);
- the police reports from the camp police station and Pantin police station, which can be consulted at the archives of the Paris Police Prefecture;

- the death records at Drancy town hall;
- the archives of the Union Générale des Israélites de France (Union of French Jews, UGIF), which can be consulted at the CDJC in the YIVO collection, and include several death notices for internees, issued to notify family outside the camp;
- records of ‘suspicious deaths’ from 1941 to 1944, which bring together the judicial police investigations routinely carried out after the deaths of any Jewish internees in the camp, which are held by the District Court and can be found in the legal collection of the Paris Archives;
- the records of the Paris Institut médico-légal (Forensic Institute, IML), deposited in the Police Prefecture archives;
- the daily records of the Paris cemeteries in which the internees were buried; and
- burial permits issued by the town hall of the 12th *arrondissement* of Paris, included in the internee burial records in the offices of the cemeteries concerned.

As this list of sources shows, the deaths were rigorously documented across a range of archives – administrative, police, judicial and medical – which, when placed end to end, form a chain of connecting information that makes it possible to retrace the journey of a body from the camp to its place of burial.

I will first look at the myth of the ‘mass grave’ at Drancy, followed by the way in which bodies were handled by the police and judicial system, from judicial police investigations to storage of the bodies at the Paris IML. Lastly, I will discuss how funeral arrangements for the bodies were handled. This final section will explain the methods used, both in terms of burial type (common graves, temporary or permanent plots) and any religious ceremonies.

### The mystery of the ‘mass grave’ at Drancy

From 1978 to the present, historians have reported varying figures, based on witness accounts, without ever seeking to find evidence of the dead in the archives. The idea of a large number of deaths among internees was propagated by witnesses, survivors and internees deported never to return, who kept diaries that began to be published in France in the 1990s. The camp was described as the site of numerous suicides in the early accounts of, and publications on, Drancy that appeared in 1945. Misleading figures have therefore been presented for decades.<sup>1</sup> And yet it was not difficult to track down the identities of those who died in the Drancy camp: as early as 1978, Serge Klarsfeld published the list of those who died in the internment camp, reporting a total of 144 Jews who had died in Drancy according to the information sent by the civil registry services at Drancy town hall and gathered from family members.<sup>2</sup> But Klarsfeld himself recognised that this figure required verification and correction – a task that, from 1978 to the present day, has never been undertaken.

Recent research by historians on the handling of those who died in the Drancy camp has repeated the same mistakes as Didier Epelbaum in his 2009 book on Capitaine Vieux.<sup>3</sup> It has thus given credence to the idea of bodies being disposed of in a mass grave. According to Epelbaum, the bodies of dead internees were transported from the camp to the Pantin district police station in a makeshift funeral procession, escorted by gendarmes and police officers, before being thrown into the nearest mass grave.<sup>4</sup> The first part of his hypothetical account is based on a witness account from a police officer, entitled 'Lenfer étoilé (The Starry Hell)', and written as part of an unfinished book project. This officer was twenty-three-year-old Raymond Gallais, adjunct to the police prefecture assigned to the camp in September 1942, who wrote: 'The corpse, often stripped bare, even of its shroud, was wrapped in parcel paper, with only the head showing. It was then trussed up like a worthless object. . . . The head of the corpse was nothing but a bloody mess, it was unrecognisable. This unfortunate was thrown from the fourth floor window.'<sup>5</sup> Perraut, the Intelligence Service Inspector, whistled and sang as if out for a stroll, twiddling his umbrella which he kept closed despite the rain.<sup>6</sup> Gallais then describes the (covered) handcart being pushed by two internees, themselves watched over by two inspectors, and their journey to the police station, where an outhouse was used as a morgue. Gallais never refers to a mass grave. Yet, in his 2009 book Didier Epelbaum claims that 'the bodies were buried in a mass grave in Drancy. They would never be found again.'<sup>7</sup>

My research shows that burials for those who died in the Drancy camp were not handled in this way. By drawing upon eight cross-referenced archival sources, I have identified those who died in the camp and located the graves of internees. This allows me to state that no remains were thrown into a 'mass grave', with all that this term evokes in relation to the anonymity and dehumanisation of Jewish dead. Interrogating this image of the 'mass grave' in fact shows that it combines two underlying realities: one linked to peacetime, and the other to the context of the war. Mass graves – trenches in which the bodies of the destitute or unidentified were piled up – have not officially existed in French cemeteries since the prefectural decree of 14 September 1850. The 'free' or 'common' grave that replaced it but prohibited the placing of bodies on top of one another represented a difficulty, first and foremost, from a religious point of view, since for Jewish people the bodies of the dead must be protected for eternity, in a permanent plot that ensures the inviolability of the remains. Under Jewish law, common graves, which were designed to accommodate bodies lined up in a trench, side by side but with a few centimetres' space between them, did not provide sufficient space for the body; most importantly, they did not allow for preservation of the grave beyond a five-year period, since after this time bodies were exhumed from the grave and transferred to an ossuary. The common grave was therefore a difficulty that was avoided in France from the 1860s onward via mutual aid societies and Chevra Kadisha: groups of Jewish volunteers, attached to local communities, who were responsible for accompanying the dead through religious rites and who established charitable societies that built common vaults designed for permanent use.<sup>8</sup> The 'mass grave' evokes the systematic murder of European Jews by the Nazis during the Holocaust and the successive devastation of

thousands of Jewish communities: a whole world of social customs, cultures and languages. Torn from their existence, these Jews are not 'gone', as the common phrase has it. They were killed and thrown underground, where their bodies are still being found today in the forests, swamps and villages of Eastern Europe.

So, how has the false belief that Jewish internees who died in the Drancy camp were summarily thrown into a mass grave been able to spread? No doubt through transposition of images from the broader spectrum of Nazi brutality. In the Warsaw ghetto a cart would come round in the early hours of each morning to collect the bodies of Jews who had died in the street or who had been placed on the pavement by their families who could not afford to bury them. These abandoned bodies were then collectively buried by the *Judenrat* in a large mass grave in the city cemetery. This sinister image of corpses being taken to the mass grave – a symbol of Jews being deprived of the basic human rituals accorded to the dead – would appear to have imposed itself to the extent of hindering the very idea of an investigation into those who died in Drancy. In the collective imagination, it is connected to the mass, anonymous handling of the corpses of Jews who were gassed, then burned in the death camps, and deprived by the Nazis of any burial. Special Action 1005, launched in 1942 in the occupied Soviet territories, sought the same end for Jews killed by death squads: to destroy the bodies of the dead and thus erase all traces of their life and death. This is illustrated by the fact that the Nazis kept no lists of Jews who died in the ghetto, or who were killed by death squads in the East. The Jews exterminated in the gas chambers were not identified prior to their murder. In France, deportation lists are the primary source of identification for Jews who died in the Holocaust, but these are incomplete. The lists found by Klarsfeld were drawn up either a few days before the date of convoy departure, or the day before, which explains why we have no trace of any last-minute changes (such as sudden deaths, substitutions or unplanned additions).

But there is no mystery when it comes to the fate of those who died in the Drancy camp: the permanency of the administrative power of the French state means that they can be identified and located. While they were living, the internees were persecuted entirely legally on French soil. They died on the fringes of the Nazi industrial killing machine, which was characterised by absolute negation of their humanity and legal identity. They were then handled according to administrative procedures commonly applied across the country, the normalcy of which may come as something of a surprise.

### The handling of the bodies by the police and judicial system

#### Judicial police investigations

A total of 127 Jews interned in the Drancy camp died there between 16 September 1941 and 26 July 1944, with the various archives consulted confirming the place of death as 'the camp'. This term was used to conceal realities as varied as deaths occurring in the barracks or one of the camp infirmaries, or as cover for burying the bodies of those who had committed suicide. Five individuals who died at the train station can be added to this list, as their bodies appear to have been brought

back to the camp, and their remains followed the same path as those of internees who died in the camp.

According to a witness account from a former internee liberated in autumn 1941, the first death in the camp, a suicide, was refused burial by Drancy town hall.<sup>9</sup> It is reasonable to assume that the circumstances of the death (suicide) were the reason for this refusal and triggered the investigative procedure, since under normal circumstances suspicious deaths were followed by a judicial police investigation. Until the investigation had been able to establish the cause of death and thus rule out any suspicions of intervention by a third party, burial could not take place. It had to be approved by the public prosecutor, and in Paris burial permits had to be issued by the town hall in the deceased's home *arrondissement*. The second death at the camp was also followed by a police and judicial investigation, even though the cause of death was not suicide. It is difficult to know whether these investigations resulted from the relatively contingent emergence of an administrative routine, or from the internee status of the victims. Either way, as cross-checking of my sources indicates, all the deaths of Jewish internees in the Drancy camp were followed by a judicial police investigation.<sup>10</sup>

Informed by telephone by the camp commandant, 'the police superintendent for the Seine *département*, with particular responsibility for the Pantin district, a judicial police officer, adjunct to the Public Prosecutor'<sup>11</sup> notified 'the competent administrative and judicial authorities by telegram' and then immediately called on two external parties. First, he requisitioned a doctor practising in the town of Drancy, a Dr Rakoto, who had 'sworn an oath before the magistrate'. This doctor produced a forensic report after examining the body (undressed in advance by the police officers drawing up the report) at the police station. This doctor was routinely consulted by the police station in relation to deaths that were suspicious or had occurred on the public highway in the Pantin district. Second, Pantin police station instructed the 'relevant police station' (located in the home *arrondissement* of the deceased) to notify the family of the death and ask a family member to come to Pantin police station to formally identify the body. In some cases, the Pantin judicial police officer sent investigators to the camp. For example, in the event of a suicide in the camp two or even three witness accounts were gathered on site, collecting a whole host of details, with the aim of establishing whether it was truly a suicide and thus ruling out any suspicions of murder. The administrative machine followed a normalised procedure: all deaths in the camp were recorded with the civil registry service at Drancy town hall by officers from Pantin police station, and the details were subsequently transcribed by the town hall of the home *arrondissement* of the internee concerned.<sup>12</sup>

From early 1943 these routine investigations were significantly curtailed, and from this point onward the investigative records are increasingly sparse. Firstly, from 28 February 1943 the corpse of the deceased was no longer transported to the police station mortuary. The body was now examined by detectives in the camp mortuary; the bodies of Jewish internees were no longer transported from the Drancy camp to the police station before their collection. Secondly, the file for the

death that occurred in the camp on 17 July 1943 states that police officers were no longer allowed to enter the internment camp grounds. Alois Brunner had officially taken over as head of Drancy on 2 July 1943 with a few SS officers, and from then on it was run as a wholly German camp, like the Royallieu internment camp in Compiègne. In the section on 'examination of the body' the judicial police officer now wrote: 'We note that no examination of the body was possible, as the Germans prohibited us from entering the Jewish-only grounds.' It should be noted that, despite this change, the remainder of the procedure carried out by the judicial police officer stayed the same, with burial permits remaining subject to approval from the public prosecutor. It can be concluded therefore that, despite the circumstances, the Germans did not take over administrative management of deaths in the camp and that this remained devolved to the French authorities.

### **Storage of bodies at the Paris Institut médico-légal**

One thing is clear: almost all the bodies of internees who died in the Drancy camp were sent to the Paris IML.<sup>13</sup> They were transported there, either from the police station or from the camp, by the Paris Pompes Funèbres Générales – the city funeral directors.<sup>14</sup> The morgue, which was located on quai de la Râpée in the 12th *arrondissement*, was used as part of judicial police investigations to store the bodies of unidentified individuals and those who had died in accidental or non-accidental road incidents or met their death by criminal means, or as a public health measure, and to carry out autopsies by judicial order. Only the magistrate in charge of the investigation could issue the burial permit for such cases.

Those who died in Drancy were transferred to the IML under two specific circumstances: first, as part of a judicial police investigation so that an autopsy could be performed to determine the true cause of death; and second – after a preliminary investigation concluding that the death was irrefutably either natural or a suicide – 'for the purposes of sanitation' and/or 'storage' while awaiting burial. It is interesting to note that the first death at the camp, in September 1941, was followed by a preliminary investigation that concluded it was a suicide: the burial permit was issued without the body being previously transported to the IML or an autopsy being requested, but more surprisingly still, the body was not sent to the IML for storage purposes. It was not until the second death (a heart attack) that routine transport to the IML was established, either accompanied by an autopsy request or simply while awaiting burial.

I have been unable to find any information in the archives relating to the decision to send the bodies of Jewish internees to the IML. I can only deduce from the change that occurred between the first and second deaths and the subsequent routine nature of the procedure that such a decision was made. Analysis of the public prosecutor and IML archives reveals a shift: a focus on the judicial handling of the bodies of dead internees gradually gave way to a focus on funeral arrangements, with the IML increasingly appearing to be simply a holding location for the bodies rather than a place for autopsies to be carried out. As the police investigations became less probing over time, autopsies became rarer events. Between October

1941 and August 1942 nearly one in four bodies sent to the IML were autopsied (five out of eighteen). The German authorities put a stop to this. The death of an internee called Huppert on 14 August 1942 was followed by a police investigation, which included the recommendation from Dr Brocard, the “Aryan” camp doctor’ appointed by the police prefecture, that ‘an autopsy is required’. But this was opposed by Judenreferat SS Röthke, whose decision is stamped in red across the file: ‘Obersturmführer Rothke Judenreferat avenue Foch: autopsie pas nécessaire [autopsy not required]’. From this date onward, only seven autopsies were carried out on the 110 bodies subsequently transferred to the IML until the closure of the camp. I have been unable to identify the specific reasons for these autopsies.

Also worthy of note is that out of the 129 bodies of those who died in the Drancy camp that were sent to the morgue, twenty-two were ‘abandoned’ at the IML, meaning that no family came forward to claim and bury the body. The first ‘unclaimed’ corpse was in November 1941 and the second in January 1942; there were nineteen such cases between July 1942 and December 1942, and a final case in July 1943. Twenty-one of the twenty-nine bodies of internees sent to the IML between November 1941 and December 1942 were therefore abandoned, equating to nearly two-thirds of the bodies transferred during this period: all received free burial in Thiais cemetery in Paris, which was opened in 1929 and was used to bury the destitute and unclaimed or unidentified bodies from the IML. For each of the Drancy internees, the daily cemetery records note ‘common’ as the ‘plot type’, ‘the 12th’ (*arrondissement*, the location of the IML) as the place of external origin of the bodies, adding in ‘observations’: ‘IML. From Pantin’ (the district of the police investigation). The failure of families to claim a body triggered an ‘administrative route’: fees and taxes were noted as uncollected, and the burial of these abandoned remains appears to have been paid for by the Paris city funeral directors, as was the case with destitute individuals during this period.

The peak in abandoned bodies at the IML can be seen to coincide with the period during which Jewish families were being targeted for arrest. From 15 July 1942 no more family members of these ‘abandoned’ dead responded to the summons from Pantin police station to identify the body, whether because they were in hiding or had been deported. For these investigations, officers simply briefly noted in their reports: ‘no known family’, ‘no individual known at this address’ or ‘family departed for unknown destination’. And yet, paradoxically, from July 1943 onwards, as the threat increased, no more bodies of Drancy internees were abandoned at the IML, suggesting that someone outside the IML was responsible for burial. It was the UGIF (Union of French Jews), from 1943, that took over burial in the place of families. From January 1943 the IML records briefly refer to the authorities approved to collect the bodies of internees: these state, ‘Mr Lévy UGIF’.

## Funeral arrangements for the bodies

### The UGIF: burying dead internees in place of families

The internees who died in Drancy were not anonymously or collectively buried in a mass grave. Instead, my research shows that between 1941 and 1944 they were

buried in Paris cemeteries in accordance with a normalised procedure, either by their families via Parisian funeral directors (Jewish or non-Jewish) or through the action or delegation of the UGIF. The increasingly important role of the UGIF in arranging burials can be seen from January 1943.

The year 1943 represented a turning point in antisemitic policy in France, with the Nazis intensifying their actions by resuming and accelerating deportations, which had been suspended since November 1942. Raids were now carried out on children's homes and hospitals. The collaboration policy of the Vichy government resulted in a slowdown, due to reluctance to involve the police in deporting Jews with French nationality,<sup>15</sup> which culminated in its refusal in summer 1943 to revoke the nationality of Jews who had become naturalised after 1927. The hardening of the Nazi position was reflected in the fact that the UGIF now found itself in the position of direct interlocutor with the Germans. Röhke, head of the Jewish Affairs department at the Security Police (Sipo-SD), worked in conjunction with the French authorities, while SS Alois Brunner, who came to France after arranging the deportation of Jews from Salonica in February, took over the Drancy camp in June and prohibited the French police from entering it in summer 1943. From then on he relied on the 'Jewish administration' of the camp, which he established.<sup>16</sup> Brunner began to prepare for the coming internment of the thousands of Jews that the Nazis hoped to denaturalise. It was in this context that more and more functions previously performed by the French authorities were transferred to the UGIF.

Burying the dead was added to the 'provident' roles of the UGIF, which was created by a law of the French state on 29 November 1941. The sphere of providence covered the management of occupational accidents or illnesses leading to the incapacity, disability or death of an individual. Under this law, the UGIF provided 'representation for Jews before the public authorities, particularly in relation to issues of support, providence and social redeployment' (article 1). The organisation had a focus on social issues, as it was also the direct successor, in the North Zone, of the Coordination Committee for Jewish Charities in the Parisian region.<sup>17</sup> The area of religion was excluded from the remit of the UGIF, and remained the responsibility of the consistory. However, I have observed evidence of significant collaboration between the consistory and the UGIF in relation to burials: this can be explained by the continuity of this activity, which, due to its religious and technical specificity, was performed by the same parties as before the creation of the UGIF.<sup>18</sup>

The UGIF was given official responsibility by the German authorities for burying Jewish internees and destitute Jews.<sup>19</sup> It was assigned this role in August 1942. The UGIF had a Department 50, responsible for 'Burials', and on 3 November 1942 it decided to absorb Terre Promise (Promised Land) into this department, due to the significant assets and numerous vaults owned by the company.<sup>20</sup> The sole purpose of Terre Promise, a Jewish provident society founded in September 1854, was to guarantee its members a permanent plot in one of the cemeteries in Paris. Upon its formation it was quickly successful, growing from 120 contributors in 1861 to 2,264 by 1885, and it acquired 504 plots and buried 870 people over the



same period.<sup>21</sup> From spring 1942 onwards, the UGIF had had a close relationship with this provident society, which was located at 27 rue du Château d'eau in the 10th *arrondissement* of Paris, and, following the decree of 28 August 1942 (*Official Journal* of 4 September), Maurice Levy, the head of Department 50 and ex-director of Terre Promise,<sup>22</sup> was authorised to sign all documents concerning funerals, burials and vault openings on behalf of the UGIF. But this provident society did not carry out the burials itself. The UGIF also absorbed the Jewish funeral directors Schnerf, based at 11 rue Notre-Dame de Nazareth in the 3rd *arrondissement* of Paris, which, having been appointed a provisional administrator from 26 May 1941 under the terms of the German laws of 18 October 1940 and 26 April 1941, joined the UGIF with approval from the Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives (Commissariat-General for Jewish Affairs, CGQJ), and was thus able to avoid having to cease activity. The UGIF personnel records for Department 50 include a file for Léon Schnerf: it states that in February 1944 his eponymous funeral directors, located at 11 rue Notre-Dame de Nazareth in the 3rd *arrondissement* of Paris, became part of the UGIF.<sup>23</sup> The 'Aryanisation file' recording property confiscated from Schnerf notes that the company, as a 'Jewish company with approval to continue', had been given official responsibility by the German authorities in August 1942 to bury destitute Jews and dead internees on behalf of the UGIF.<sup>24</sup> However, despite the establishment of this dedicated department, burials were not exclusively carried out by the UGIF: the archives show that Jewish funeral directors other than Schnerf continued to remain active and bury Jews in Parisian cemeteries. The plot deeds and burial records for the Drancy internees also refer to various funeral directors acting on the orders of families or by delegation from the UGIF.<sup>25</sup>

The findings of my research demonstrate the increasing power of the UGIF in the burial of Drancy internees from January 1943 onwards. From 13 January 1943 to 2 August 1944, of the ninety-four deaths in the camp, sixty-five were buried by the UGIF, with seven by explicit mandate from the UGIF to the Schnerf funeral directors. For the remaining twenty-nine, reference to various Jewish or non-Jewish funeral directors can be found in the consistory records, but I have been unable to ascertain whether or not they were acting on the orders of the UGIF. From summer 1943, internee burials were almost routinely arranged by the UGIF, and a consistory religious service, paid for by the UGIF, was even provided for each burial. The consistory rabbis were appointed based on a system of daily rotation, as shown in the burial records, with the exception of Thiais and Ivry cemeteries, for which only the rabbis Tchernaiia and Weill are listed in November 1943.<sup>26</sup> Thus, of the ninety-four internee burials carried out between January 1943 and June 1944, seventy-six were performed by a rabbi from the consistory, with all of the burials carried out directly by the UGIF or under its orders. And from July 1943 onwards, of the fifty-five internee burials recorded until the closure of the camp, forty-two were carried out by the UGIF, all under the aegis of a consistory rabbi. By way of comparison, between October 1941 and January 1943, none of the thirty-eight internees who died in the camp appears to have been buried with any participation from the UGIF mentioned in the archive, and only five of them were buried by a consistory rabbi.

### The different types of burials in Paris cemeteries

The breakdown of burial sites for those who died in the camp (for those I have been able to find in the Paris cemeteries' daily records, i.e. 125 internees) is as follows:

- Sixteen internees were buried in Bagneux cemetery in Paris: four between September and November 1941, one in December 1942, eight between January and March 1943, one in November 1943 and two in January and February 1944.
- Three internees were buried in Père Lachaise cemetery: one in 1941, one in 1943 and one in 1944.
- Forty-one internees were buried in Ivry cemetery: fifteen between January and the end of March 1943 and twenty-six between January and April 1944.
- Ten internees were buried in Montparnasse cemetery: two in September 1942, six in 1943 and two in March and April 1944.
- Fourteen internees were buried in Pantin cemetery: three in 1942, nine in February and March 1943 and two in 1944.
- Forty-one internees were buried in Thiais cemetery: six in autumn 1941, nineteen in 1942 (from July to December), eight in 1943 (in January, and then in autumn and winter) and eight in May 1944.

Thiais and Ivry cemeteries were the two preferred burial sites for internees from the Drancy camp in terms of overall figures, with forty-one internees buried at each site. There appear to have been two successive burial periods in Thiais: one from autumn 1941 to January 1943 (with no reference to the UGIF), and another from August 1943 to June 1944 (with reference made to the UGIF). The burials in Ivry began from January 1943. While the types of burials that took place varied (in the common grave in Thiais, and in temporary plots in Ivry), these two locations share a similar feature when it comes to internees who died in the camp: their graves have no plot numbers, making it impossible for historians to find information about these burials in the Paris cemeteries. This is because the absence of a plot number means there are no plot deeds – which typically include the name of the purchaser and date of purchase – or burial records.<sup>27</sup> At the time, families were able to find out where their loved one was buried, as demonstrated by the fact that evidence can be found of seven plot renewals in Thiais cemetery by families after the war, and of eight exhumations followed by transfer of the body to another cemetery (within Paris or elsewhere in France). In Ivry, fifteen bodies were exhumed and transferred elsewhere after the war, and seven plots were renewed.

In Thiais, internees received a particular type of burial between November 1941 and January 1943: burial in common graves. This did not require prior purchase of a plot and involved burying the destitute in narrow, individual spaces separated by a thin strip of earth of around 10 cm. A small plaque noted the name of the deceased who was buried there. The common graves of Drancy internees were located in division 13. They were 'recovered' at the end of the war: the plots were resold and the bones were taken to the ossuary. Between autumn 1941 and January 1943 twenty-two bodies (twenty-one of which had been 'abandoned' in storage at the IML) were

buried in Thiais at no cost and without a consistory religious ceremony.<sup>28</sup> We may hypothesise that the UGIF was not active during this period and that the ‘abandoned’ bodies of these internees like those of the destitute, were buried by the city authorities and city funeral directors, on the orders of the 12th *arrondissement* town hall.<sup>29</sup> Between August 1943 and June 1944 nineteen other internees were buried in Thiais by the UGIF, but in temporary plots (with no numbers); only two internees were buried by the UGIF in personal vaults acquired in Thiais at an older date.

In Ivry, the UGIF, which appears as the named paying party in the daily burial records, buried all the internees in temporary five-year plots acquired by the organisation (these also lack plot numbers, even though the acquisition of temporary plots should have provided them with one): in divisions 23, 26 and 28 in 1943, and in division 44 in 1944. In Ivry, no internees were buried in an existing family vault.

In relation to the rules presiding over the choice of cemetery for the burial of Drancy internees in common graves, I can see no exemption from the legislation. I was able to find the Paris cemetery regulations, and in particular the official maps for burial in common graves, in the Paris Archives.<sup>30</sup> These show that:

- between 28 January 1941 and 28 December 1942, deceased from the 12th *arrondissement* of Paris (the IML *arrondissement* from which the bodies were transported) had to be buried in Thiais, which was the case for the Drancy internees;
- the rule was changed from December 1942 until 15 June 1943: common grave burials were suspended in Thiais, other than for the families of those buried there for fewer than two years. During this time, the dead from the 12th *arrondissement* were buried in the common grave in Bagneux;
- on 15 June 1943 Thiais again became the preferred Paris cemetery for free burials of the dead from the 12th *arrondissement*;
- but on 12 December 1943 problems with the supply of petrol made it necessary to limit journeys made by hearse: Bagneux again became the preferred location for free burials, now for the whole city of Paris, and Ivry for burials in five-year plots.

Applying these regulations to the burial sites for those who died in Drancy makes it possible to identify any deviations from the norm.

- Thiais: Drancy internees buried in the common grave were buried there from autumn 1941 to January 1943, as set out in the regulation. A complete stop was put to such burials in Thiais between 8 January and 27 July 1943, in line with the decree of 28 December 1942.
- Ivry: Drancy internees were solely buried in Ivry, but in temporary plots, during the first six months of 1943 after common grave burials were prohibited in Thiais cemetery from 28 December 1942. From January 1944 Ivry became the legal

burial site for the dead in temporary five-year plots: between January and April 1944, twenty-six Drancy internees were buried there.

In the Paris cemeteries other than Thiais and Ivry, internee plots much more routinely had numbers assigned: as a result, plot deeds and burial records exist and have been preserved. These make it possible to gather information on the paying parties and burial vaults. Despite the incomplete nature of such records, analysing them allows me to deduce that internees might be buried by their families or by the UGIF, either in personal vaults acquired previously or on their death by their families, or in vaults owned by Jewish societies, the purpose of which was to guarantee their subscribers a permanent plot. Several of these existed in Paris, like *Terre Promise*.<sup>31</sup> But those who died in Drancy might also be buried in these society-owned vaults without having contributed to them while living: the UGIF seems to have gone above and beyond its role as a substitute for deported families or families in hiding and requisitioned these sites for the dead, as I have found evidence, primarily at Bagneux cemetery, of routine burials paid for by the UGIF in collective society vaults. This was not the case in *Père Lachaise*, where internees were buried in private or family vaults and burial was carried out by the UGIF itself. In Bagneux, Montparnasse and Pantin, however, this type of ‘arrangement’ can be seen.

- In Bagneux, six of the dead had acquired family plots prior to the war, in which they were directly buried by their family on their deaths, one in a plot in a Jewish society vault to which he had paid contributions. Eight others were buried by the UGIF in plots in society vaults appropriated by the UGIF.<sup>32</sup> Only one dead internee was buried in the common grave there, in January 1943.
- In Montparnasse, three burials took place by delegation from the UGIF in *Terre Promise* vaults. The seven others were buried in family vaults: four arranged by their family, and three by the UGIF.
- In Pantin, two internees were buried in vaults that had been purchased by their families in the interwar period; three others in plots acquired by the family at the time of the internee’s death; and three internees were also buried by the UGIF, one in a vault belonging to the Jewish company *Mon Repos* (*My Rest*).

### Conclusion

Those who died in the Drancy camp have long been overlooked or thought to have disappeared without trace. But, while these dead have disappeared from collective memory, there is abundant evidence in the archives of their handling by the French police, the judicial system, forensic medicine, the consistory, funeral directors and Paris cemeteries. The only documents missing are the burial records for internees who were buried in common graves or for whom plots were acquired but without identification numbers, which have been thrown away by Paris cemetery offices.

At first it would seem impossible to draw comparisons between the Jews who died in the Drancy camp before deportation to the East and the Jews who were murdered *en masse* by firing squad in the ‘bloodlands.’<sup>33</sup> The ways in which they were buried were entirely different: the bodies of Jews killed by firing squad are still being found in mass graves that were used as the site and instrument of murder. Sometimes marked, but more often lost in ravines or forests, these pits are no substitute for graves: the sites were not protected from raids, no names of the dead are known or displayed and the numbers of corpses were not identified.<sup>34</sup> In France, on the other hand, those who died in Drancy were buried in individual, named graves that – in the case of permanent plots – have been maintained. There is a second notable difference: while, even now, survivors are unable to retrieve the bodies of loved ones who were shot dead in mass graves in Eastern Europe and bury them in an individual grave, the families of internees who died in Drancy were informed of their deaths and burial places. This is illustrated by the fact that they transferred bodies to family vaults at a later date: between 1943 and 1960 the bodies of twenty-five internees who died in the grounds of the Drancy camp were transferred from their burial place in a Paris cemetery to another location. Most of the bodies of internees who were transferred were buried in Ivry (fourteen), Thiais (eight) and Pantin (three). Ten of the bodies of these twenty-five internees were transported to another Paris cemetery, three to the Paris suburbs and twelve outside the Paris region. The largest number of transfers took place between 1945 and 1947, with a total of twelve bodies transferred over this period. The dead moved after the war included the poet Max Jacob, who was interned in the camp in late February 1944 and survived there for only one week. Buried in Ivry cemetery by the UGIF on 11 March 1944, his body was transported to Saint-Benoît cemetery in the Loiret region in March 1949.

However, I have been able to establish a parallel between the hundreds of people who died in Drancy and the millions of Jews murdered by the *Einsatzgruppen* death squads during the Second World War in Eastern Europe. This concerns the particular type of collective forgetting that surrounds these dead, or more specifically the belief that they completely disappeared as a result of the Nazi extermination plan. Where are those who died in Drancy? This question, difficult to answer for decades, resulted in the myth of the mass grave – meaning the impossibility of ever knowing. In relation to the fate of the Jews murdered by firing squad in the East, my intention is not to downplay the extensive research by historians: as early as 1961 Raul Hilberg described the ‘mobile killing units’ in Eastern Europe,<sup>35</sup> and many researchers have followed in his footsteps.<sup>36</sup> This aspect of the Holocaust, in relation both to Nazi decision making and to the murder of countless Jewish communities, has been and continues to be documented. The forgetting of the dead to which I refer is not the political forgetting seen in many countries in the former Soviet bloc, which consists in erasing all memories of local or national participation in Nazi extermination. Rather, it is a forgetting of victims as subjects of their history. Restoring a subjective history to these murdered Jews is *also* achieved by seeking out their ‘graves’ in both Eastern and Western Europe. Without being either moral or ethical, the challenge

for current research is perhaps to contribute to lifting this taboo, which acts as a prohibition on knowledge.

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### Notes

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- 1 In 2009 Didier Epelbaum reported a total of 130 suicides in the Drancy Camp: see *Obéir: Les déshonneurs du capitaine Vieux, Drancy 1941–1944* (Paris, Stock, 2009), p. 194. In 2012 Annette Wiewiorka and Michel Laffitte, inflating the figures in Georges Wellers' book (*L'Étoile jaune à l'heure de Vichy: De Drancy à Auschwitz* [Paris, Fayard, 1973]), described there having been over a hundred suicides in the summer of 1942: see *À l'intérieur du camp de Drancy* (Paris, Perrin, 2012), p. 157. In 2015 R. Poznanski and D. Peschanski referred to 'around thirty deaths' between 20 October and 5 November 1941: see *Drancy, un camp en France* (Paris, Fayard, 2015), p. 76 and more broadly seventy deaths up until 31 December 1942, which likely includes the forty deaths cited by Georges Wellers in *L'Étoile jaune* (p. 133). Maurice Rajsfus was the first to display caution about this issue: 'Many are thought to have died in Drancy but there is a lack of sufficiently detailed information on the exact number of those who died there of various diseases and despair, in addition to suicide'; see M. Rajsfus, *Drancy: Un camp de concentration très ordinaire 1941–1944* (Paris, Manya, 1991), p. 289. [Translator's note: Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this article are our own.]
- 2 S. Klarsfeld, *Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France* (Paris, FFDJF, 1978, new edition 2012).
- 3 Epelbaum, *Obéir*.
- 4 On references to the mass grave, see Wiewiorka and Laffitte, *À l'intérieur*, p. 157 and Poznanski and Peschanski, *Drancy, un camp en France*, p. 133: these two books reflect Epelbaum's idea of the mass grave in *Obéir*, p. 194.
- 5 The internee in question was Abraham Khovers (in the statement, his name is spelled incorrectly, as Kower).
- 6 CDJC CCXXVII-27 p. 30. This undated statement is deposited at the CDJC in a collection dating from the 1970s. But it is known to have been partly published as

- early as 1945: see Jacques Darville and Simon Wichene, *Drancy la Juive ou la deuxième inquisition* (Paris, Breger Frères, 1945), p. 54.
- 7 Epelbaum, *Obéir*, p. 194.
  - 8 Patricia Hidirogrou, *Rites funéraires et pratiques de deuil chez les Juifs en France XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1999), p. 150.
  - 9 CDJC CCXIII-106: '5th witness account, 2nd page', p. 10: 'first victims of oedema'.
  - 10 Archives de Paris (AP), 'Suspicious death' files (1939–45), article 426-617, public prosecutor's records, High Court, 1st section AP PEROTIN 222/74/1 526 to 601 for the Drancy internees. My findings are based on cross-checking of the following sources: internment records, the camp transfer log, death records at Drancy town hall, IML records for the period 1941–44, judicial police investigations, consistory religious burial records and the daily records for Paris cemeteries.
  - 11 The police superintendents were, successively, Lucien Tissot, Raymond Chassot, Frédéric Voinot and Jules Pégon – both in an interim capacity – and then Jean Le Menn from January 1944.
  - 12 See, for example, the case of Sternberg: his death certificate number 2982 at the town hall of the 11th *arrondissement* of Paris on 18 November 1941 is a transcript of the notification of his death on 31 October 1941 at Drancy town hall. The only exceptions I have observed are two cases of stillborn infants whose traces are found in the camp archives, but were not reported to the civil registry service, although one was investigated by the police.
  - 13 A total of 129 bodies were transferred to the IML: three fewer than the total number of deaths in the camp. In addition to the first internee who died in the camp, whose body was not sent to the IML, two other internees, presumed to have died in the camp, according to the camp transfer records, are not included in the IML registers: one in April 1944 and the other in June 1944. I would speculate that their absence from both the IML archives and those of the judicial police (but also the civil registry service at Drancy town hall) is due to their having ultimately died in hospital rather than in the camp, but this hypothesis remains to be confirmed.
  - 14 See AP, PEROTIN 222/74/1/566, which refers to this information: 'Have the body of the said Guirchowitz transported to the Institut médico-légal by the Paris Pompes Funèbres Générales.'
  - 15 S. Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz: La 'solution finale' de la question juive en France* (Paris, Fayard, 2001), pp. 209 and 221.
  - 16 CDJC, CCCLXXVII-15.
  - 17 On the UGIF, see M. Laffitte, *Un engrenage fatal: L'UGIF face aux réalités de la Shoah 1941–1944* (Paris, Liana Levi, 2003).
  - 18 There are a few indications of confusion between the consistory and the UGIF prior to January 1943: the burial of an internee who died of cachexia on 13 December 1941 is recorded as having been paid for by the consistory in the IML records, but the consistory files list Schneeberg as the paying party. For the child internee René Pzredicki, who died in 1937 at the Claude Bernard Hospital, the consistory went as far as writing a letter to the hospital bursar on 9 September 1942, asking for the Schneeberg company to be given authority for the burial; and finally,

the Schnerf records show that it was the Consistorial Association of Paris that paid for the burial of a Drancy internee on 2 October 1942. Should we therefore conclude that the UGIF deferred to the consistory when it came to burials? It is worth recalling the existing links between the UGIF and the consistory: first and foremost, the fact that UGIF leaders in the occupied zone were all from the consistory inner circle. The consistory made premises available to the UGIF, which in 1942 protected members and leaders of the consistory from deportation by providing them with identity cards.

- 19 French National Archives: archives of the CGQJ and Department of Restitution. Aryanisation files for Assets in section VIII-BR (domestic trade). Property seized. MIC/AJ38/3077/file 6272: File for Léon Schnerf. Letter from Kurt Schendel, Jewish German lawyer, head of Department 14 of the UGIF, dated October 1943, signed by Gestapiste Robert Jodkun, acting as confirmation for the CGQJ that the Schnerf funeral directors were acting on behalf of the UGIF.
- 20 CDJC, CDXXIII-6. Preparatory documents were requested by the UGIF from 26 June 1942 in order to assess the true value of the assets owned by Terre Promise. This property may have included temporary plots in Ivry cemetery, where the UGIF buried Drancy internees from January 1943.
- 21 See Hidiroglou, *Rites funéraires*, p. 153. Figures for later periods are unavailable.
- 22 Terre Promise, a Jewish provident society and funeral director, was dissolved by the law of 29 November 1941 and attributed to the UGIF. On this, see CDJC CDXXIII-6.
- 23 Central Consistory Archives, D.C.C-28 UGIF.
- 24 French National Archives, A archives of the CGQJ and Department of Restitution. Aryanisation files for Assets in section VIII-BR (domestic trade). Property seized. MIC/AJ38/3077/file 6272: File for Léon Schnerf.
- 25 The difficulty here is that the most comprehensive source of information, namely the consistory archives for religious burials of internees, is incomplete, since between autumn 1941 and January 1943 only a small proportion of those who died in the camp received a religious burial. For the others, we have only the burial records of the two Jewish funeral directors, meaning that we know nothing about the burial of these early internees who died in the camp. One observation can be made: in the consistory archives, the UGIF is not referred to during an initial period from the end of 1941 to the end of 1942, with the name of the acting funeral director included instead. When the Drancy internees are identified in the archives of Jewish funeral directors we can see that it was the families who ordered and paid for the burial of their family members who died in the camp. For the Drancy camp, between late 1941 and early 1943, I can only hypothesise, after examining these archives, that when it came to burials the UGIF acted as an intermediary between the Jewish administration and families on the outside.
- 26 See the cover page of the burial records of the central consistory from 1942 to 1946, Archives CC NN 2223.
- 27 For burials in common graves, loose cards acted as burial records, but unfortunately these were all destroyed after the war, due to the lack of storage space in the Paris cemetery offices.



- 28 The remaining body is that of a female stillborn foetus, sent to the IML, whom I was unable to trace in the Paris cemetery daily records.
- 29 The burial permits issued by the town hall and loose cards for common grave burials for bodies abandoned at the IML were destroyed in the cemetery offices (except for Bagneux cemetery office). Records for burials without plot numbers in Thiais and Ivry were also thrown away by the cemetery offices.
- 30 AP, 1326W50.
- 31 On this subject see Hidirolou, *Rites funéraires*, pp. 151–62.
- 32 I have been unable to identify the name of this society.
- 33 T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (London, Basic Books, 2010).
- 34 As they liberated Eastern Europe, the Soviets opened up the mass graves of Jews killed by firing squad in order to assess the human and material cost of the war. This information, which consisted of records for each village including witness statements, location maps and diagrams of mass graves, can be found in the archives of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission, a copy of which is held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. On the Commission, see Nathalie Moine, 'La commission d'enquête soviétique sur les crimes de guerre nazis: entre reconquête du territoire, écriture du récit de la guerre et usages justiciers', *Le Mouvement social*, 222 (2008), 81–109.
- 35 R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, vol. 1 (New York and London, Holmes & Meier, 1985), pp. 274 and onwards.
- 36 To cite merely a selection of such work: C. R. Browning, *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (New York, Holmes & Meier, 1985); P. Burrin, *Hitler et les Juifs: genèse d'un génocide* (Paris, Seuil, 1989); F. Bedarida, *La politique nazie d'extermination* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1989); Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion, 1941–1943* (Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 2003); W. Lower, *Nazi Empire Building and Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2005); M. Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000); and O. Bartov, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007).