

A Jewish girl's pendant was found at a Nazi camp - and now Yad Vashem is looking for her relatives

A pendant bearing Karoline Cohn's birthdate and city of birth found at Sobibor is almost identical to one that belonged to Anne Frank, and researchers are trying to determine whether the two were related.

By Ofer Aderet | Jan 15, 2017

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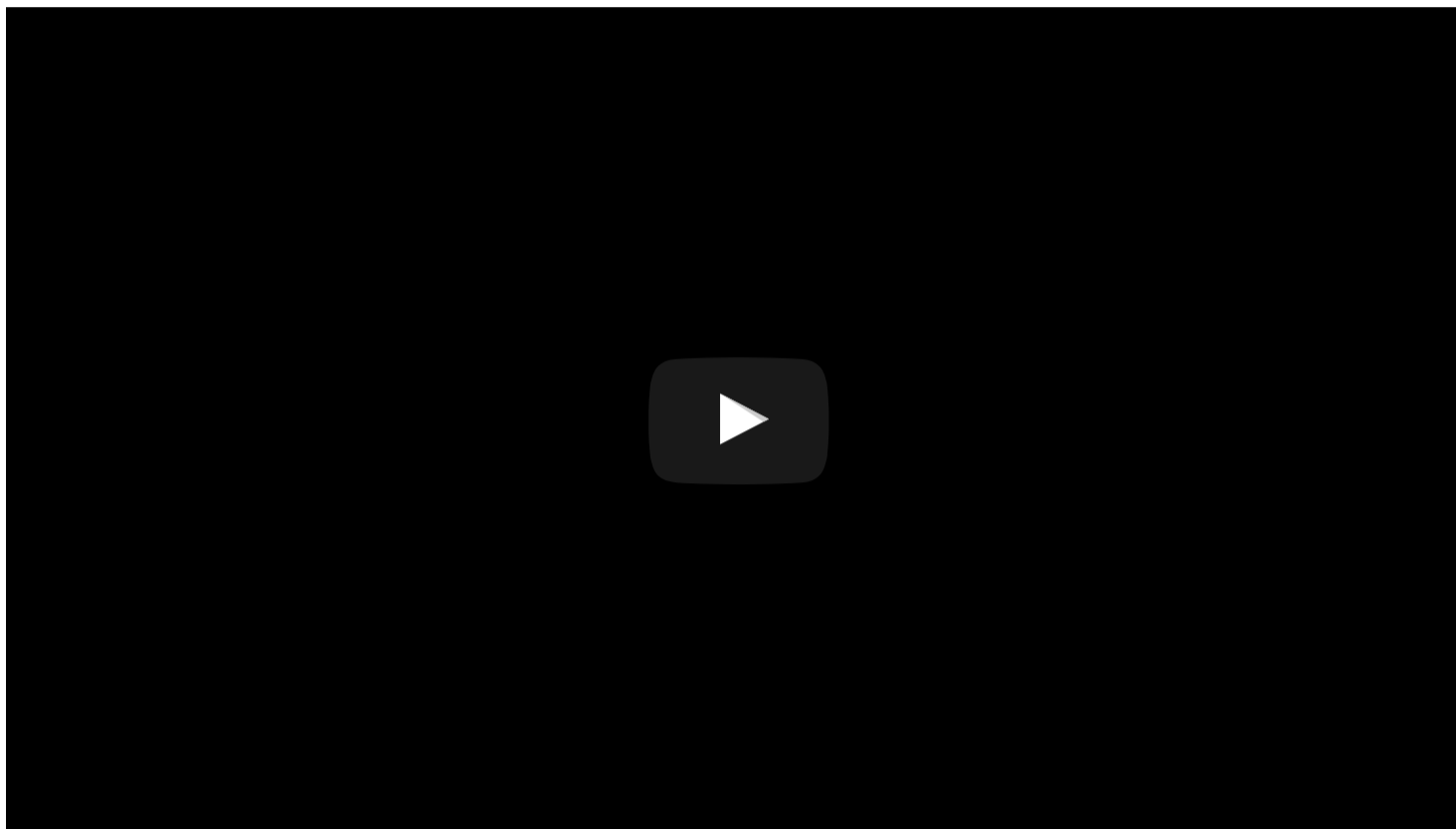
Yad Vashem and the Israel Antiquities Authority are searching for the relatives of a Jewish-German girl murdered in the Holocaust, whose pendant was recently found at the site of the Sobibor death camp in Poland.

The girl, Karoline Cohn, was born in Frankfurt on July 3, 1929. On November 11, 1941, she was deported to the Minsk ghetto. What happened to her next is unclear. But her necklace was brought to Sobibor in September 1943, either by her or by someone else.

That month was when the Minsk ghetto was liquidated and some 2,000 of its residents were sent to Sobibor. There, the necklace was lost or removed, and it has remained hidden in the earth ever since.

The pendant, along with other pieces of jewelry and additional items belonging to Holocaust victims, was found in October 2016 during an archaeological dig at the site conducted by Yoram Haimi of the Antiquities Authority, his Polish colleague Wojciech Mazurek and Dutch archaeologist Ivar Schute. The excavation is receiving guidance from Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research and is being funded by the Sobibor Steering Committee.

The excavators found the remains of the hut where women's hair was cut off before they were sent to the gas chambers. There, they found hairpins and jewelry that had evidently fallen beneath the floorboards more than 70 years ago and remained there to that day.



A Jewish girl's pendant found at a Nazi camp. Credit: Yad Vashem and the Israeli Antiquities Authority

The items included one triangular pendant that bore some clues to its owner. One side was engraved with the words "mazel tov" in Hebrew, the date July 3, 1929, and the name of the city Frankfurt am Main in German. The other side bore the Hebrew letter "heh" and three Stars of David.



With help from researchers at Yad Vashem, Haimi managed to find the pendant's likely owner. The complex research, led by Dr. Joel Zisenwine, director of the research institute's Deportations of Jews Project, found Karoline Cohn's name on the list of Jews sent from Frankfurt to Minsk on November 11, 1941. Her birthdate and city of birth match the date and city inscribed on the pendant.

Further research discovered that an almost identical pendant – the only other one researchers know of with this design – belonged to Anne Frank, who was also born in Frankfurt.

Now, the researchers are trying to make contact with both the Cohn family and Anne Frank's family in an effort to learn additional details about the necklace and whether the two families were related.

The dig site at the Sobibor death camp in Poland. Credit: Yoram Haimi/ Antiquities Authority

Sobibor was established in March 1942 along with two other death camps, Treblinka and Belzec. Some 250,000 Jews, mostly from Poland, the Netherlands and Slovakia, were murdered at Sobibor from April 1942 to October 1943. That month, a prisoners' revolt broke out at the camp, during which half the prisoners escaped. After that, the Nazis shut down the camp, razed it to its foundations and tried to destroy all evidence of its existence.

The archaeological dig at the camp began in 2007. Its initial goal was to locate the camp's buildings, including the gas chambers. But the excavators also found the original train station and a large number of personal items belonging to Holocaust victims.

In addition to Karoline Cohn's pendant, they recently found a glass-covered metal pendant bearing an image of Moses holding the tablets of the law on one side and the words of the "Shema" prayer on the other. They also found a pendant in the shape of a Star of David and a woman's watch.

A glass-covered metal pendant bearing an image of Moses. Credit: Yoram Haimi/ Antiquities Authority

Among the noteworthy items found earlier were metal disks on chains that were engraved with contact information in case the children wearing them got lost.

During the latest dig, the researchers also found ground where the tracks of the machinery the Germans used to raze the camp was still visible. This evidence survived even though the Germans planted trees over the tracks to hide them.

"These findings make an important contribution to Holocaust research," said Prof. Havi Dreifuss, director of the Center for Research on the Holocaust in Poland at Yad Vashem's research institute. "They help us understand what happened at Sobibor better, both in terms of how the camp functioned and in terms of the identity of its victims and their fate. For instance, the current discoveries enable us to trace how Jews were deported from Germany to the Minsk ghetto and from there to extermination in Sobibor, and also shed light on the extermination process at the camp itself."

A ring found at the Sobibor death camp in Poland. Credit: Yoram Haimi/ Antiquities Authority

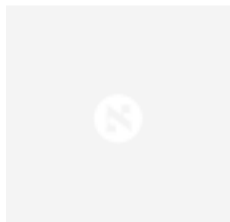



“The pendant we found once again demonstrates the importance of archaeological research at the death camps,” added Haimi.

“Karoline’s moving story is the story of the Jews who arrived and were murdered at the camp, and it’s important to tell this story.

“The importance of the research at Sobibor is magnified with every new digging season,” he added. “Each time we come, we uncover another part of the camp, find additional personal items and expand our knowledge of the camp a little.

“Despite the efforts the Nazis and their helpers made to obscure [the evidence], including planting a forest at the site, we’ve managed to reconstruct, to correlate testimony with what is known to us from the survivors and to preserve the memory of the people murdered there,” Haimi concluded.

Now, Yad Vashem and the Antiquities Authority are seeking the public’s help in locating Karoline Cohn’s relatives, or anyone who knows Sophie Kolman, the relative who filled out Cohn’s page of testimony in 1978. Anyone with any information should email Haimi at yoramhai@israntique.org.il.

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