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MEMORIA

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79TH
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OF THE
LIQUIDATION OF
THE ROMA CAMP
IN AUSCHWITZ

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OŚWIĘCIM

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AUTUMN 2023
PROGRAM IN

MÉMORIAL DE LA

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We invite all of you to work closely with us. We would be grateful to receive information about events, projects, publications, exhibitions, conferences or research that we should share with our readers. We also accept proposals for articles.

Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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'CAN YOU BE WRONG ABOUT THE WHOLE CITY?'. THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLT IN THE TREBLINKA II EXTERMINATION CAMP

On August 2, 2023, ceremonies were held to commemorate the Treblinka II extermination camp victims on the 80th anniversary of the camp's prisoners' revolt. Among the guests were Ada "Krysią" Willenberg, Holocaust Survivor, wife of Samuel Willenberg, a participant in the Treblinka uprising, Israeli Ambassador Yacov Livne, Dani Dayan, director of the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, as well as Holocaust Survivors, Righteous Among the Nations and representatives of the highest state and local government, diplomatic corps, cultural institutions, clergy and Jewish organizations from Poland and abroad.

The celebration of the 80th anniversary of the revolt in the Treblinka II extermination camp gathered several hundred people. We would like to thank everyone who was with us at the Treblinka Museum and those watching the event coverage. We would like to thank the partners of the event, the Treblinka Museum. The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944) and the World Jewish Congress, we would like to thank the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda for honorary patronage of the event.

Before the start of the official ceremony, Dariusz Lipowski, Deputy Director of the Jewish Historical Institute, together with a delegation from Treblinka Museum. The Nazi German Extermination and Forced Labour Camp (1941-1944) laid wreaths at the execution site next to the Treblinka II penal labour camp.

The main ceremony began with an opening of the exhibition of Samuel Willenberg's sculptures depicting scenes from the extermination camp. Then the gathered people went to the Monument to the Victims of the Death Camp in Treblinka. "It was a heroic struggle of a handful of

doomed people against the loss of human dignity. Of the dignity of people who have already been stripped of everything, of all their wealth and health. They were malnourished, hungry and exhausted, yet they put up a heroic fight. The horror of this place touches us. Historians are not sure whether 800,000 or 900,000 people died here. And I ask myself: how can you be wrong about a hundred thousand human lives? 100,000 human beings are like such cities as Płock or Elbląg. Can you be wrong about the whole city? Of course, this is not a complaint against historians, but the fact that we do not know the names of these people. They were destroyed along with the memory of them. We call it a double crime," said the director of the Jewish Historical Institute, Monika Krawczyk.

"Thank you to everyone who came here. It is known that it is not a great pleasure to be in this place, to partly experience what those who were here experienced. My husband recalled that he cursed every moment that he was still alive, because it was better to die in the camps. I am grateful to all those who remember and who try to ensure that the memory of those who died here is not forgotten," said Ada Willenberg.



80th anniversary of the camp's prisoners' revolt in the Treblinka
Photo: Andrzej Stawiński



of the outbreak of the uprising in the Treblinka extermination camp, it is necessary to recall the steadfast attitude of those who decided to actively oppose evil and fight for dignity and freedom,” wrote the Minister of Culture and National Heritage Piotr Gliński in a letter read by Dr Piotr Szpanowski, director of the Department of Cultural Heritage at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

“How much courage and determination it took to oppose the armed Germans, being practically defenceless. How much desire for life and freedom was needed to decide on such a desperate step,” said Karol Polejowski, deputy president of the Institute of National Remembrance.

“We can and should view complex facts and questions regarding our past and our present as opportunities that in the end strengthen us as individuals, communities and nations. How to present the most accurate account possible of what transpired here? How to avoid blurring the Jewish centrality of Shoah remembrance? How to engage young people, regarding the legacy of Treblinka, the Shoah, and World War II without compromising accuracy and complexity? Only truthful answers will ensure that in another 80 years of remembrance of Treblinka, remembrance at Treblinka will endure and will continue to inspire and make us better human beings,” said Dani Dayan, director of the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem.

“It's hard to talk, but you have to talk. Treblinka was created by Nazi Germany as a kind of black hole. An extermination camp where all Jews were to die and be forgotten. But today we are standing here, remembering the Treblinka uprising, remembering the heroes who fought against absolute evil. They fought with their bare hands for freedom and life - said the Ambassador of the State of Israel Yacov Livne.

“It is not easy to speak here as a representative of Germany, and even today it's hard to find the right words to describe the monstrous crime committed by our ancestors here in Poland. Today at the 80th anniversary of the uprising in the Treblinka extermination camp I bow my head in deep sorrow and humility for all the victims”, Minister Plenipotentiary at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Robert Rhode, began his speech.



79TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIQUIDATION OF THE ROMA CAMP IN AUSCHWITZ

"The Gypsy family camp", the so-called Zigeunerfamilienlager, located in the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp, was liquidated by the Germans on the night of 2 - 3 August 1944. It was then that some 4,300 children, women and men - the last Roma inmates of the camp - were murdered in the gas chambers. 2 August is commemorated as Sinti and Roma Genocide Remembrance Day.

The commemoration of the Roma and Sinti extermination was held at the site of the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz II-Birkenau, where state authorities, international organisations, ambassadors, diplomats, politicians, representatives of local authorities, and institutions and museums gathered to pay tribute to the Victims and laid wreaths.

'I am deeply moved and touched that today - on the occasion of the Sinti and Roma Genocide Remembrance Day - I can speak to you as a representative of our survivors,' Gerda Pohl said at the commemoration.

Speaking about her family history, she recalled: 'My late husband Horst Pohl fought for his life here in Auschwitz. That is why it is particularly important for me to remember the Holocaust against the Sinti and Roma right here,' she stressed. During her speech, she referred to the problem of discrimination and exclusion: 'However, we must be careful that they do not start again. [...] Therefore, I implore you, with all my heart, to fight racism wherever you encounter it. First, I would like to appeal to young people: The future of Germany, Europe and the whole world rests in your hands,' she said.

Referring to history, Roman Kwiatkowski, President of the Roma Association in Poland, said: 'The criminal ideology of the Nazis sought to erase a nation from the map of Europe that had existed in its history for

nearly 700 years. However, the Roma and Sinti survived the extermination, just as they had survived every period of persecution and exclusion. [...] They also survived to bear witness now to the truth about the times of contempt and its consequences. We are pleased that more and more young people are here every year.'

Announcing next year's round anniversary, Roman Kwiatkowski emphasised: 'Next year will mark the 80th anniversary of the extermination of the Zigeunerlager Auschwitz-Birkenau. I hope we will meet then without the many fears that burden us today, and that the Holocaust will primarily serve as a lesson in history and remembrance rather than a warning of a new threat of fanaticism and racism. Future generations can never experience the fate of their ancestors; it is a responsibility we all bear towards them.'

Romani Rose, President of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, also spoke: 'Auschwitz is a symbol of a turning point in the history of civilisation and the crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis against 500,000 Sinti and Roma and 6 million Jews. [...] It is with great concern that we observe the proliferation of anti-democratic attitudes and violent right-wing extremism across Europe today.'

In his speech, Rose also alluded to the current situation: 'In Eastern Europe, for example, a large proportion of Roma live in apartheid-like conditions and are excluded





Totalitarianism, destructive nationalism and extremism must have no place in our society. Together, we must strive to live together with respect and mutual understanding,' said the Vice-President of the European Parliament.

Michał Kamiński, Deputy Speaker of the Polish Senate, also referred to the present day in the context of historical memory in his speech: 'Until very recently, we might have thought that if we come to Auschwitz, we come first and foremost to honour the memory of the Victims of the enormous, unspeakable tragedy that took place here. However, today we are not only here to remember but also because we believe that those nightmares in our thoughts are forever buried.'

'Yet this is not the case. Today, old demons are resurfacing in both Western and Eastern Europe. It turns out that just as 80-90 years ago on German soil, so today and in other

countries, we are experiencing the grim lesson that no civilisation or nation is exempt from the sins of racism and hatred,' stated Michał Kamiński.

The Prime Minister of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki, addressed a letter to the participants of the celebrations. It was read by Mateusz Małodziński, Deputy Governor of Małopolska. "The Roma and Sinti, our neighbours, and an integral part of our heritage for centuries, who had created their own original culture, were systematically exterminated and sent to concentration camps located in central Europe. They were the third-largest group of prisoners at Auschwitz, after Jews and Poles. Brought in from fourteen countries, they died of hunger, disease, and gassing".

"Once again, we take the pledge that we will do everything to ensure that the times of

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Romowie w Auschwitz



Auschwitz
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Romowie i Sinti w obozie Auschwitz



LEARNING ABOUT THE HISTORY OF LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITIES IS A GOOD STARTING POINT FOR UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

The Auschwitz Jewish Museum lies a few kilometres away from the Auschwitz Memorial. For over two decades, the institution has been caring for the centuries-old heritage of the local Jewish community and organising numerous ambitious educational programmes. It also offers the opportunity to visit the town's only preserved synagogue, the Jewish cemetery, the memorial park or the interactive exhibition entitled "Oshpitzin. A History of Jewish Oświęcim".

It is a journey covering nearly four centuries, culminating with the tragedy of the Holocaust that saw the near-total annihilation of the city's Jewish inhabitants. During our discussion with Tomasz Kuncewicz, the director of the Auschwitz Jewish Centre Foundation and head of the Auschwitz Jewish Museum, we explored the pre-war Jewish residents' use of the term Oshpitzin to refer to their place of residence.

The history of the Jewish community in Oświęcim dates back to the second half of the XVII century. Their heritage is commemorated by the Jewish Museum in the heart of the city, near Oświęcim's Old Town. Why that particular location?

Our institution is located at Fr. Jan Skarbek Square, between Oświęcim's market square and the Piast Castle. It houses the Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot Synagogue (Eng: The Society for the Study of Mishnah). It is a unique trace of our city's Jewish past - the only surviving Jewish temple of pre-war Oświęcim. The synagogue was put into use in 1918. During the II World War, it was converted into a German ammunition depot, and during the communist era, it was, among other things, a carpet warehouse. Following the fall of communism, it was only handed

over to the Jewish Community in Bielsko-Biala, which subsequently donated it to our foundation. We carried out a comprehensive renovation of the synagogue and restored its religious function.

Nevertheless, before the Second World War, the city had as many as 20 synagogues and prayer houses. It is not unfounded. Given that half the population was Jewish.

Yes, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, there was an exceptionally thriving Jewish community in Oświęcim. Some 8,000 people, over half the population, were Jewish residents of the town. We commemorate the four centuries during which they co-created the history of Oświęcim. After all, they were irreversibly affected by the Holocaust. A few kilometres from where the Jewish Museum is located today operates the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. Jewish inhabitants of Oświęcim were also sent to the camp. After the war, a handful of people returned to the town, less than 180 of its Jewish inhabitants. Until the mid-1960s, a few families lived in the city but eventually left Oświęcim.

Save for one person who went to Sweden and then returned. It was Szymon Kluger.



Tomasz Kuncewicz w ubiegłym roku został uhonorowany Nagrodą Pamięci im. Ireny Sendlerowej. Wyróżnienie jest przyznawane osobom szczególnie zaangażowanym na rzecz zachowania żydowskiego dziedzictwa Rzeczypospolitej. Fot. Maciej Jaźwiecki

create a park of remembrance and reflection on the site in collaboration with the people of Oswiecim. The project was initiated by our institution and implemented through a fundraising effort involving local residents and entrepreneurs, public institutions, and descendants of Oświęcim's Jews. Created less than four years ago, the park is not only a much-loved leisure space for locals and tourists but also a unique educational site. It is increasingly frequented by groups visiting Oświęcim and the Auschwitz Memorial.

Another unique project is currently underway. It is being created on a site whose history is also uniquely linked to the II World War. It is a Jewish cemetery that was destroyed during the war and, in recent decades, has also been cared for by the Jewish Museum.

During the war, a labour camp operated in the area. The cemetery currently contains post-German bunkers and parts of the wartime fence. During the German occupation of the city, the matzevot located there were destroyed and used as building material for pavements, streets and cobbling the banks of the Soła river. In the subsequent decades, however, they were discovered, and in recent years, the inhabitants of Oświęcim and the surrounding area have brought them to us. Given their dilapidated condition, erecting them like the other matzevot was unfeasible. For this reason, we are creating a 'Bunker of Remembrance' - as we have named our project - on one of the concrete bunkers mentioned earlier. The fragments of the matzevot found are mounted on a concrete bunker. Its intention is two-fold: to commemorate and symbolically dominate the object that the Nazis built on the site of the cemetery. We want to finalise the project on 17 September. This is when the cemetery will be open for guided tours as part of the European Jewish Heritage Days. I cordially encourage the public to take advantage of this opportunity.

A visit to the Jewish cemetery, Jewish Museum, and synagogue is the ideal starting point for a visit to the Auschwitz Memorial. We depict the rich Jewish history of Auschwitz and educate that the Holocaust was



out of nowhere. It was brought about by the politics of prejudice and hatred. Thus, we undertake activities in the scope of anti-discrimination education.

Are there any additional sources that discuss these issues in more depth?



fot. Mykhailo Kapustian / Jakub Certowicz / Andrzej Rudiak / Piotr Strycharski / Piotr Gajek



"NATIONALISM, ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE HOLOCAUST," FOR AUSTRIAN SCHOOL TEACHERS

Teaching about nationalism, the Holocaust and anti-Semitism faces significant challenges: How does the growing time gap from the National Socialist era impact the learning process? How can teachers respond appropriately to increasing anti-Semitism and racism? What does this entail for teaching, as the composition of students becomes increasingly diverse?

The answer to these challenges at the Pädagogische Hochschule Tirol is a new two-semester course entitled "Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust - History and the Present". It was developed in collaboration with the network coordinators of the Tiroler ERINNERN:AT programme OeAD and is addressed to secondary, vocational and polytechnic school teachers.

The course provides basic didactic and factual knowledge about Jewish life in Tirol, terror and persecution, resistance and the culture of remembrance. It also presents a variety of educational materials and exercises to show the possibilities of contemporary teaching about nationalism, the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. The combination of these topics with an explicit reference to the present makes this course





AUTUMN 2023 PROGRAM IN MÉMORIAL DE LA SHOAH

At the end of 2023, we will open a new exhibition "Riss: the Papon Trial" to mark the 25th anniversary of this historic trial, featuring previously unpublished sketches. Additionally, the exhibitions "Music in the Nazi Camps", "Julia Pirotte: photographer and participant in the resistance movement", and "1943: the Warsaw Ghetto and the CDJC uprising" are still ongoing.

As a part of the "Great Witnesses" series, we are providing a platform for the Holocaust Survivors to share their stories through meetings, screenings, and testimonies, including Ginette Kolinka's speech before the premiere of the comic book "Farewell, Birkenau. The story of Ginette Kolinka, an Auschwitz survivor". Further testimonies can be found during Documentary Film Month: "Writer in Hell. Benevolent" by Jonathan Littell, directed by Jean-Christophe Klotz, and "Insurgents!" by Rafael Lewandowski.

The "History in the Present" series dedicated to the year 1943 will conclude with three meetings on the fate of Jews in the former Italian zone, the history of the Sobibor extermination camp in the General Government and the rescue of Jews in Denmark.

"Great Meetings in the Auditorium" will explore current literature, documentation and photography of past and present wars, while several remembrance tours, workshops and journeys will be available for all ages, individuals and groups, families and pupils.

We look forward to your attendance at one of these events, either at the Mémorial or online via our social media platforms, allowing you to take advantage of these cultural offerings that elevate the Mémorial as a place for life, contemplation, and essential education.

Jacques Fredj, Director of the Mémorial de la Shoah



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