

Auschwitz Album

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Hungarian Jews on the Judenrampe (Jewish ramp) after disembarking from the Holocaust trains. Photo from the Auschwitz Album (May 1944)

The Auschwitz Album is a unique photographic record of the Holocaust of the Second World War. A collection of photographs taken inside a Nazi German death camp, it is the only surviving pictorial evidence (with the exception of four surreptitious photographs taken by Sonderkommandos) of the extermination process from inside the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi concentration camp.

The identity of the photographer has never been determined. They may have been taken by either Ernst Hoffmann or Bernhard Walter, two SS men responsible for fingerprinting and taking photo IDs of those prisoners who were not selected for extermination.

The album has 56 pages and 193 photographs. Originally, it had more photos, but before being donated to Yad Vashem (the Holocaust museum in Israel), some of them were given to survivors who recognized relatives and friends.

The images follow the processing of newly arrived Hungarian Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia in

the early summer of 1944. They document the disembarkation of the Jewish prisoners from the train boxcars, followed by the selection process, performed by doctors of the SS and wardens of the camp, which separated those who were considered fit for work from those who were to be sent to the gas chambers. The photographer followed groups of those selected for work, and those selected for death to a birch grove just outside the crematoria where they were made to wait before being killed. The photographer also documented the workings of an area called Canada, where the looted belongings of the prisoners were sorted before transport to Germany. The album's survival is remarkable, given the strenuous efforts made by the Nazis to keep the "Final Solution" a secret. Also remarkable is the story of its discovery. Lili Jacob (later Lili Jacob-Zelmanovic Meier) was selected for work at Auschwitz-Birkenau while the other members of her family were sent to the gas chambers. The Auschwitz camp was evacuated by the Nazis as the Soviet army approached. Jacob passed through various camps, finally arriving at the Dora concentration camp, where she was eventually liberated. Recovering from illness in a vacated barracks of the SS, Jacob found the album in a cupboard beside her bed. Inside, she found pictures of herself, her relatives, and others from her community. The coincidence was astounding, given that the Nordhausen-Dora camp was over 640 km (400 mi) away, and that over 1,100,000 people were killed at Auschwitz.

The album's existence had been known publicly since at least the 1960s, when it was used as evidence at the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials. Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld visited Lili in 1980 and convinced her to donate the album to Yad Vashem. The album's contents were first published that year in the book *The Auschwitz Album*, edited by Klarsfeld.

Legacies – the catalogue of the Collections of the Auschwitz Memorial

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AUSCHWITZ LEGACIES

