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THE AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU MUSEUM & MEMORIAL SITE THE FORMER GERMAN NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPAND EXTERMINATION E

THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTION OF MEMORY AND ITS OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Abstract

The paper describes the activities, structures and tasks of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, one of the most important remembrance institutions and the most important Holocaust Memorial in Poland. The short outline of the camp's wartime history is followed by sections concerning the post-war site's use and commemoration, the forming of the Museum, concepts of its shape, and contemporary challenges to its activities. The selected Museum's structures were discussed: the archives, exhibitions, research, collections, conservation and visitor services departments.

Keywords: Auschwitz, Holocaust Memorial, archives, museum collections, conservation, research

INTRODUCTION

The Protected Site and the Museum's History

he museum and memorial site located at the former ▲ concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau was established in 1947 as the Oświęcim-Brzezinka State Museum. In 1999 the museum was renamed as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau). In 1979 the sites in the museum's custody—the remains of the concentration camps Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau-were registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list as the "Auschwitz Concentration Camp". In 2007 the name on the list was revised to "the Former Nazi German Concentration and Extermination Camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau". These changes were made to eliminate any erroneous identification of the German concentration and extermination camps as "Polish camps".

The mission of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is, in accordance with the still-valid Act of 1947, "to preserve the camp for all time as a monument to the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other nations" (Auschwitz Act 1947 §1). The language of the act was appropriate for its time, but in fact it set the Museum a very difficult task: to preserve, maintain and keep open to the public the huge complex of buildings making up the largest German concentration camp and extermination centre. Currently, the Museum's responsibilities cover the remains of the concentration camp (Auschwitz & Auschwitz II-Birkenau)—almost 150 buildings covering an area of about 170 hectares—and the remains of the destroyed barracks, gas chambers, crematoria and other sites. The Konzentrationslager (KL) Auschwitz III-Monowitz and the numerous KL Auschwitz sub-camps and other buildings scattered throughout Upper Silesia (usually at mines and factories, where the prisoners performed slave labour) are outside of the Museum's remit.

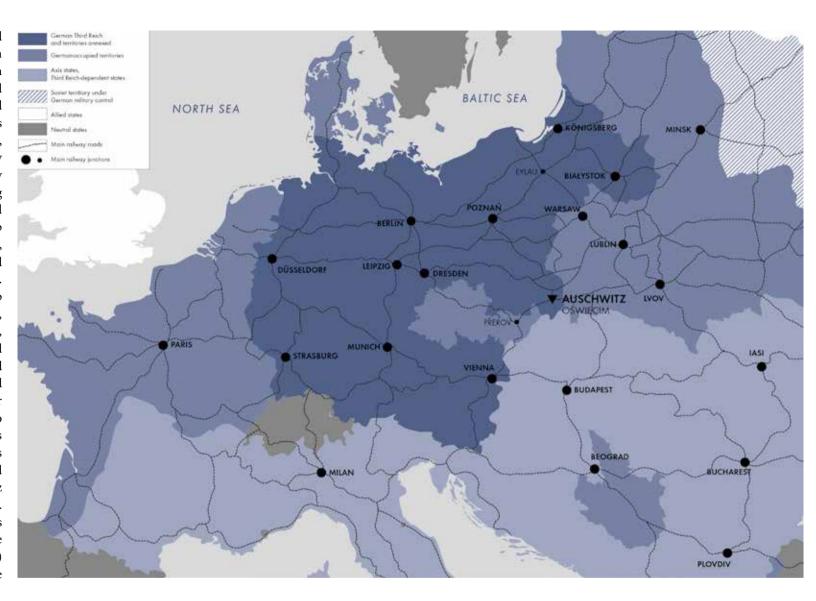
An Outline of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp's History

The concentration camp was established by the Germans in the Polish part of Silesia, which they occupied in 1939 (and was then incorporated into the Reich as part of the German province of Upper Silesia, within the limits of the Katowice region, Regierungsbezirk Kattowitz, Reichsgau Oberschlesien), and became known by the German name for the town of Oświęcim: Auschwitz. Similarly, the German names given to the villages incorporated into the camp-Brzezinka (Birkenau) and Monowice (Monowitz)—became the formal terms for its other parts: Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Auschwitz III-Monowitz. The camp, located on the edge of the historic town of Oświęcim, was separated from the surrounding area by a so-called *Interessengebiet*; so the camp and the area of interest were inaccessible even to the regular German authorities, not to mention the Polish civilian population, and the whole of the continually expanding complex remained under the control of the SS. The Auschwitz camp was launched in April 1940, and like the other concentration camps it was subject to the SS's Inspectorate of Concentration Camps (Inspektion der Konzentrationslager), that was subordinate to the SS-Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, and after 1942 to the SS's Main Office of Economic Management (SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt, SS-WVHA). The concentration camp at Auschwitz was originally designated as a place for the liquidation of the "leadership class" of the Polish nation and society. (German: Führungsschicht: the broad sense of this concept included all kinds of workers in the Polish administration, teachers, local activists, social and political activists, professionals, academics, clergy, officers, intellectuals, etc.). The establishment of the camp meant that it rapidly grew in size and significance due to its location in a well-urbanised region with many industrial plants, the site of a major railway junction (which was significant even before World War I, when Oświęcim was ruled by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy), that allowed good communication with the other territories of occupied Poland, Germany, the Protectorate of Bohemia & Moravia, Slovakia and Hungary.

57

REMEMBRANCE INSTITUTION

Over the next few years the camp gained and changed functions, becoming one of the main tools of German occupation policy in Poland, and then in Central and Eastern Europe. The camp received political prisoners from occupied Poland, from the Protectorate of Bohemia & Moravia, and from the ghettoes of almost all of Europe, Soviet prisoners of war captured by German forces on the eastern front, victims of German pacification and counter-insurgency actions conducted in Poland and Belarus (including many children), activists of the French resistance deported during the "Nacht und Nebel" actions, and civilian residents captured and deported from Warsaw during the 1944 Rising. The camp became—next to the death camps at Chełmno, Sobibór, Bełżec and Treblinka—one of the main sites for the planned and mechanised extermination of European Jews and Roma. The majority of the Jews who had been deported to the camp from the ghettos of occupied Poland, Theresienstadt Ghetto, the internment camps in France, Holland and Belgium, and those deported from Slovakia, Greece, Yugoslavia and Hungary (see Piper 2000, pp. 9-62, 217-231) were murdered in the camp's gas chambers. Apart from the isolation and liquidation of political prisoners and the mass murder of Soviet, Jewish and Roma prisoners, the camp was also intended to serve as a significant element of the Third Reich's war machine. Thousands of prisoners were sent to work as slave labour in a network of sub-camps (Nebenlager), located primarily near coal mines and factories, and at the Auschwitz III-Monowitz camp, where a large chemical plant was built. Not only was the prisoners' work valuable for the Germans but the deportees' personal belongings (mostly from those who were killed immediately after arriving at the camp) were sorted and sent for reuse in the Reich; the hair of those



killed was used to produce fabrics and slippers for sailors on submarines, and the gold teeth bolstered the Reich's budget. Many prisoners in Auschwitz were used as "human material" for a variety of pseudo-medical experiments, aimed i.a. at testing methods for the mass sterilisation of women and men, and verifying the effectiveness of vaccines and drugs for infectious diseases, as well as pseudo-anthropological research.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp after January 27, 1945: the Origins and Creation of the Museum

Concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated on January 27, 1945 by the Red Army as it entered the Polish territories occupied by Germany. Most of the prisoners were not freed at that time: there were only about 7000 prisoners left in the camp, those who had been declared unfit for evacuation, who were principally the sick and children. Most of the prisoners had been evacuated westwards by the SS:



USAF aerial picture of the Auschwitz and Auschwitz II-Birkenau camps, made during a bombing raid on the Buna-Werke (IG Farben factory located at the Auschwitz III-Monowitz camp) in September 1944, as displayed in the main exhibition. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

the majority (more than 56,000) by foot in the Death Marches, so named because of the inhuman winter conditions and the deaths of many prisoners (who either died of exhaustion or were killed by German guards). It is estimated that between nine and fifteen thousand prisoners were killed during the evacuation; those who did not die during the Death March found themselves in other German concentration camps.

Initially, the former Auschwitz I camp was used to house prisoners from the NKVD prison camp No. 22, and Soviet military hospitals; a Polish Red Cross hospital was also installed there. The hospitals mainly cared for former prisoners of the Germans who had been left in the camp. Other former prisoners were admitted to hospitals in the towns of Oświęcim and nearby Brzeszcze. In autumn 1945 the Soviet military authorities put the Auschwitz I camp at the disposal of the Polish authorities. The camp area came under state control and was used on an ad hoc basis, including by the District Liquidation Office (Okregowy Urząd Likwidacyjny), which liquidated and distributed the assets of the German former occupation authorities. Even before the formal creation of the Memorial Site, its former prisoners began to make efforts to protect the camp site, see (Lachendro 2007, pp. 38-41; Trojański 2015a). In 1946 they began to organise the former Auschwitz I site, and accepted visitors (often the families of the victims and former prisoners). The State Museum opened on June 14, 1947, the seventh anniversary of the first transport of Polish political prisoners from Tarnów to the camp. On July 2, 1947, the Legislative Parliament of Poland (Sejm Ustawodawczy) adopted a law on commemoration (Auschwitz Act 1947), which, incidentally, is one of the few uncontested acts adopted by this parliament that was returned in the elections rigged by the Communists.

In 1947 the Museum was also expanded to include the area of Auschwitz II-Birkenau, where the NKVD prison camp No. 78 had hitherto operated. This was a POW camp, which also held Poles and Germans interned by the Soviets in Silesia. In total, the NKVD camps at the former Auschwitz-Birkenau camp held tens of thousands of German prisoners of war and German and Polish detainees (Lachendro 2015, pp. 199-221; Kopka 2002, p. 40; Cyra 2016). In February 1945, the local District Office of Public Security (the local office of the Communist security police) was still managing a temporary forced-labour camp

and detention centre in the camp buildings located between Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. This camp was then subordinated to the Central Labour Camp at Jaworzno, and continued to function until 1948 (Kopka 2002, pp. 147-148; Cyra 2016). The "capacity" of the Labour Camp at Oświęcim was estimated at 1500 prisoners, but on average it held from several hundred to over a thousand prisoners. Until 1946 most of the prisoners were Silesian Germans, Volksdeutsche and German prisoners of war; in 1947 the camp also served as a staging point for Ukrainian and Lemko deportees from the south-eastern provinces of Poland (Kopka 2002, p. 148). In 1948 there were still 20 German prisoners of war in the camp that was referred to in the Ministry of Public Security's documentation as "the POW camp at the Museum of Martyrdom", see (Kopka 2002, p. 127, 148). As was common practice at the time, the Communist authorities used former German concentration and POW or resettlement camps to jail people arrested as or suspected of being opponents of the Communist dictatorship: this happened not only at Auschwitz, but also at the camps at Majdanek, Stutthof, Lamsdorf, Lebrechtsdorf-Potulitz, and many smaller sites.

The activity of the Soviet committee investigating German war crimes, which came into being before the museum's foundation and vetted the camp soon after its liberation, was of considerable importance to the later operation of the museum. This was also true of the Polish Main Committee for the Prosecution of German Crimes (Główna Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Niemieckich), see (Lachendro 2007, pp. 29–32; Lachendro 2015, pp. 160-183, 184-198), that was responsible for documenting the occupiers' crimes and preparing the charges for the trials of Rudolf Höss, the commander of Auschwitz camp, and his SS staff (1947). The Main Committee's handover of the Auschwitz archives in 1957 marked the start of the Archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, and made it possible to conduct important informational and scientific work.

Shaping a Vision for the Memorial Site

The creation of the Memorial Site was not only founded on the preservation of the site itself and the movable objects that remained after it ceased functioning. Equally important was the creation of an exhibition that would present the camp's history and inform the visitors about the fate of the victims. Another important element was that of symbolic commemoration. The beginnings of the exhibition at the Memorial Site were associated with the beginnings of the Museum itself. The history of the Museum since it was founded in 1947 to 1979 (together with references to its history in later years), as well as the exhibition and the changes in its content, have been presented competently and within the broader context of its operation by Jonathan Huener (Huener 2003); its review in (Lachendro 2009) and see also (Świebocka 2005; Trojański 2012; Trojański 2015b; Trojański 2018). The juxtaposition of two concepts defending the memory of the camp's victims, and the successive models of memory under the influence of the state (testimonies by the prisoners, interpretations of Auschwitz's role in the history of Poland, and in the history of the Jewish people, all inflected and countered by successive versions of Communist propaganda)—created many situations of tension, which left significant traces on the form of the exhibition at Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum after 1947. In fact, the operation of the Memorial Site has created the strongest "figure of memory" (or "idiom of memory"), which moves the symbolic and factual elements of knowledge about Auschwitz and positions them in the collective memory of national and political communities. The most significant periods when the models of memory came into conflict with the influence of Communist propaganda were 1950-1955 and 1967-1989. The first of these periods saw the "Stalinisation" of the message of the Museum's exhibition: it included elements of propaganda targeted against the Western world and "capitalism", together with the reorganisation or even the removal of some fragments which recalled the Jewish and Polish victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Huener 2003, pp. 92–104); the tendency to "de-Germanise" the perpetrators was already evident at that time. The thaw after Stalin's death saw the dismantling of the most extreme elements of Communist propaganda at the camp exhibition, and led to the creation of a new principal exhibition in 1955, which still exists today (Huener 2003, pp. 104–107; Trojański 2013, pp. 328, 340–341).

The thaw in the Soviet bloc, and partially the liberalisation of Communist Poland's international relations, made also possible the creation of an international supervisory body for the Memorial Site—the International Auschwitz Council, IAC (Międzynarodowa Rada Oświęcimska) see (Huener 2003, pp. 147-150; Trojański 2019), and the introduction of new elements into the exhibition.

Since the liberation of the camp, different concepts for the continued protection of the camp's relics have clashed in the public discourse (Lachendro 2007, pp. 38-40, 43-45, 55–60, 73–99). The eternal preservation of the camp's contents was, and remains, an obligation based in Polish law. However, its maintenance requires considerable effort, especially in regard to those buildings and remains that are less durable and prone to consistent degradation. A significant reference to the question of maintaining the remains at the camp was made in a plan that demonstrated a revolutionary approach to the question of commemorating victims: the design of a memorial to the victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau by a group of Polish architects and sculptors in 1957-1958 (Oskar Hansen, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Julian Pałka) assumed the "petrification" (the enclosure inside a stone "path") of a strip of land 70 metres wide, which would cut off the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, together with its remains found within its outline, and leaving the items in the rest of the camp to the power of nature and effectively, to their destruction over time (Maliszewska 2017, p. 130; Grzesiuk-Olszewska 2018, pp. 44–47; Murawska-Muthesius 2014, pp. 200-201, 206-211; Dwork, and van Pelt 1994, pp. 248-251; Wóycicka 2018, pp. 114-115). However, in the face of opposition of some members of the IAC—including former prisoners—this project was not accepted. Instead, the current memorial at Birkenau was designed by a collective of Polish and Italian groups, and Oskar Hansen withdrew from further work (Grzesiuk-Olszewska 2018, pp. 46–47; Murawska-Muthesius 2014, p. 207). Voices were raised that the conservation of camp items and the Museum's use of some of them transformed the monument into an imitation of itself, or gave the camp site new meanings (the theft of the "Arbeit macht frei" sign and its replacement with a copy during conservation work on the damaged original indicates the need for such activity in extreme situations; see Dwork



and van Pelt 1994, pp. 232-234, 236-239, 246-248; Knoch 2018, pp. 223-226, 234-237); one suggestion was to leave the camp at Birkenau to the processes of natural destruction, and to maintain Auschwitz I as it was more durable (Curry 2010, Hanrahan 2017).

The proposals to leave the camp to the forces of nature were not, and still are not, being considered at present; the Museum's positive initiative has been decisive in this matter (as has the support of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, for whom the preservation of the remains of the camp is a goal enshrined in its statutes), as have the provisions of the act establishing the Museum. The undisputed objective is to preserve not only the movable objects, but also the buildings and sites which are in ruins.

For the Memorial Site, the democratic transformation of Poland after 1989 meant above all the need to deal with the past distortions or manipulations involved in the previous transfer of knowledge. The political authorities of the Communist dictatorship placed their own emphases on the exhibition, which resulted in the identity of Auschwitz's victims being moved to the background. For example, the changes to the original 1947 exhibition at Auschwitz I made in the first half of the 1950s blurred the Jewish origin of most of the victims (Lachendro 2007, pp. 62-71; Trojański 2013, pp. 341-343); for more on similar changes in the Museum at Majdanek, see also (Kuwałek 2013, pp. 285-286). The newer main exhibition prepared in 1955 (and which still stands today with few alterations), changed this approach to a certain extent. It should be noted that the events of the war were not so distant at that time, and the identities of both victims and perpetrators were something quite obvious to the public. The enormous symbolic weight of Auschwitz—also as a place of undeniable German crimes against the Polish people—prevented the Museum's narrative function from being totally subordinated to the propaganda of the Communist dictatorship. Another considerable moderating circumstance was the fact that there were many former prisoners still alive in Poland at that time.

The conflict between historical truth, and respect for the "figures of memory" and the pressure of Communist propaganda was once again embodied in the history of the Memorial Site after 1967, when the political line of the Soviet Block became almost officially anti-Semitic, with the most infamous roles being played by the USSR and Communist Polish state. The unveiling of the monument in Birkenau in 1967 and the opening in 1968 of the exhibition on the Holocaust in Block 27 in Auschwitz I camp took place during the above-mentioned "correction" of the party line, and served as a kind of "fig leaf" for the policy of the Communist dictatorship (cf. Huener 2003, pp. 163–169, 176–184). In the following years, the official statements of Communist party representatives significantly bypassed the fact that most of the victims of the concentration camps had been Jews. The Communist "universalisation" of the fate of the camp's victims consisted essentially of their "de-Judaisation" (Huener 2003, pp. 169-184; Szuchta 2013, pp. 327-329, 334-335; Kuwałek 2013, pp. 288-292, Owsiński 2013, pp. 314-315, see also Rutkowski 2010; Wóycicka 2018, pp. 117-118). They ceased to admit that most of the victims were Jews, indicating only the countries of the deportees' origin, for example France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, Greece, Slovakia, etc. This gave the impression that, according to criteria that were formally correct, the victims of Auschwitz were citizens of almost every country in Europe; only the Jews (which they actually were) had almost disappeared from the list of the victims. The political face of the Polish prisoners was similarly effaced: as representatives of the Polish "leadership class" (Führungsschicht) they came from a variety of political and professional circles, most of whom represented the main political forces. Significant commemoration was given only to those prisoners who were of unquestionably left-wing provenance, or simply Communists (the latter had been very few in Poland before the war, and they were treated as extremists). The identification of the perpetrators was also partially concealed: since the formation of the socialist German Democratic Republic, the official language of Communist Poland dropped any emphasis of the Germanness of the perpetrators, and the words "Germany" or "German" in relation to war crimes, genocide, and the occupying institutions and forces were replaced by terms like "Hitlerites" (hitlerowcy, hitlerowski, see Lachendro 2007, pp. 67-71, 99-100). The number of the victims and their identity were the subject of the Soviet and Communist propaganda manipulations

The remains of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp barracks. July 2018. © Katarzvna Adamów as early as 1945. The "de-Germanisation" of the perpetrators, together with the "de-Judaisation" and "Communisation" of the victims, led to the creation of a web of manipulation of the facts about the Holocaust and genocide: in the official version, the only victims of Auschwitz whose identity could be mentioned without embarrassment were the Socialists and the Communist political prisoners and the Soviet detainees.

After 1989, there was no question that the need to adapt the story of the camp's past to the political message of the Communist dictatorship had to be abandoned. Groups who had previously been neglected, especially the Roma, demanded the restoration of the memory of their victims. For the Museum, the period of political transformation in post-



communist Poland has been a time to revise the exhibitions demonstrating the fate of the victims; and also of new challenges, mainly related to the number of visitors (growing from year to year), the conservation of the camp's remains, and its educational tasks. It has become important to undertake a scholarly revision of the number of the camp's victims, as the revised figures were based on surveys conducted even before 1989, see (Piper 2000 *passim*).

The conflict between the operation of the Memorial Site as a relic of the camp and its functions as a museum and repository of information only partially results from the juxtaposition of "figures (idioms) of memory". One significant factor is the conservation of the camp's remains, which has caused controversy almost since the inception of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, see (Lachendro 2007 passim; Huener 2003, pp. 86–92; Dwork, van Pelt 1994, pp. 234–240; Hanrahan 2017), as well as the area covered by the conservation work (Dwork, van Pelt 1994, pp. 236-237). That said, certain elements have not been maintained, including the Auschwitz III-Monowitz camp and the later camp blocks located at the north-east of the entrance to the main camp, which may alter the perception of the Memorial Site as an authentic testimony, see (Dwork, van Pelt 1994, pp. 234-241). The fact that a substantial number of exhibits (mainly the material evidence of mass murder) in Auschwitz I were moved from the Auschwitz II-Birkenau site is also considered as the creation of an unauthentic environment. The conservation and introduction of elements of the exhibition practically gives the historical material a new value (Dwork, van Pelt 1994, pp. 238–239). This matter is overlapped by questions—which have been repeated almost from the creation of the Memorial Site—about how to deal with those monuments which are rapidly deteriorating (mainly the remains at Birkenau) (Lachendro 2007 passim; Hanrahan 2017). Namely, should one maintain them, "raze down and plough" or leave them to their fate? The juxtaposition of the remains of Birkenau left to the forces of nature and the petrified fragments inside the planned monument was one of the main principles of the concept for the camp monument developed by Oskar Hansen's team, compare (Murawska-Muthesius 2014; Maliszewska 2017; Grzesiuk-Olszewska 2018); also see (Wóycicka 2018, pp. 114-115).

THE FUNCTIONING OF THE MUSEUM

Financing the Museum since 1989

One of the Museum's major challenges was financial. In the post-Communist countries the 1990s saw the collapse of the greater part of the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector, which until then had been (and in most cases still is) funded by the state. The significant drop in funds meant that many cultural institutions in Poland and other countries in the region experienced a decline, or were forced to seek independent financial resources. Maintaining the Memorial Site and conducting its conservation, educational, scientific and informational work required significant sums, which could only partially be supplied by the Polish state. It became necessary to limit the most expensive projects (most commonly conservation work), and to plan only such actions as could be financed by one-off donations. A solution to the problem was found in obtaining additional funds from non-budgetary sources which would be relatively stable and transparent. Both of the Museum's directors since 1989, Jerzy Wróblewski and Piotr M.A. Cywiński, took similar steps during their tenures (although of varying scale and over diverse fields of operation), by undertaking initiatives aimed at establishing a foundation to support the Museum's statutory activities. The first foundation established on this basis (in 1990) was the Memorial Foundation for the Victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau. More than half of the expenses incurred during its operation have gone to finance publications concerning the history of the camp, and over a quarter of its expenses have been allotted to conservation work (including the preservation of documents) and repairs in the former camp. Since 1993 the Foundation has also paid for the maintenance of the trees, grass and plants in Birkenau. This may not seem like an obvious expense; however, cutting the grass and removing saplings in such a big area is a serious undertaking; for example, just cutting the grass costs around 150,000 zloty (about US\$40,000 annually) (Activity FMVAB; About FMVAB).

A significant change came with establishment of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation by Piotr Cywiński (as the Museum's director) and Jacek Kastelaniec, at the initiative of Władysław Bartoszewski (then President of the IAC). The Foundation's statutory objective is "to care for the Memorial Site—the location of the former Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II—and to support the Museum's mission", in particular, to collect funds for the maintenance of the camp, covering both the fixed objects (buildings and ruins, fragments of fences etc.) and the movable relicts located within the Museum (archives, artefacts and other objects, etc.). The Foundation's operation was premised on obtaining its own funding, the size of which would allow significant financial support for the Museum's activities (mainly conservation activities). The donors to the initial fund, in the intentions of the foundation, were primarily intended to be nation-states. The appeal by the Polish government and its diplomatic efforts led to a significant supply of endowments, consisting of donations by the governments of Germany (US\$60 million), the USA (US\$15 million), Poland (US\$10 million), France (US\$5 million), Austria (US\$4 million), the UK (US\$2.1 million), Switzerland, Italy, Israel, and Russia (US\$1 million each) plus a further 28 countries (mostly European), as well as by numerous private individuals and NGOs. Representatives of donor countries are members of the International Committee, one of the Foundation's supervisory bodies (Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Report 2009; Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Report 2010). The launch of the Foundation led to the start of multi-level maintenance work, mainly in Auschwitz II-Birkenau (the objects there were the least durable and most exposed to natural factors such as flooding, and as such required the most urgent intervention; plans for the conservation of the area had already been prepared). The first funds for maintenance work in the camp were provided by the Foundation as early as 2012 (Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation Report 2012, p. 6). The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation's financial contribution to the major maintenance work at the museum has been considerable: in 2017 it represented 10.8% of the Museum's total budget (Report 2017, p. 68).

The Visitors

Another important role in the Museum's operation is played by the inexorably rising number of visitors. According to the available data, in 2001 the Memorial was visited by 492,000 people, but by 2004 this figure had risen to more than 699,000, and then in 2005 it increased to 927,000. In the following years the numbers have steadily risen at a previously unheard-of rate, and in 2018 the camp was visited by about 2,150,000 people from almost all over the world (only in 2013 did the number fall, to more than 1,330,000 people). Visitors from Poland, who made up the majority until the end of the twentieth century, still form the largest single group (Report 2006, pp. 22-23, 25; Report 2017, p. 23). The massive influx of visitors poses significant logistical, security and informational challenges: it became necessary to adapt the informational and educational programmes to the visitors' linguistic needs, to significantly increase the number of guides (including those who speak languages other than English and Polish), and to adapt the infrastructure around the Memorial Site to the increased traffic. The burden of arranging the guided tours, educational activities and popularisation was shouldered by the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust (ICEAH), which has operated since 2005. We should also take into account the fact that the huge number of people passing through the successive blocks of Auschwitz cannot be indifferent to their condition and the way in which the authenticity of some of these objects has been preserved.

Crises, Controversies and Challenges in the Museum's Operation since 1989

Unfortunately, in recent years the Museum's activities have witnessed some major crises and controversies, which have affected certain aspects of its management to some degree. There have been many controversies regarding the camp, and in particular the functioning of its image and elements of its history in the "national figures of memory", but these do not relate directly to the operation of the museum; for this reason I will leave these problems (such as the transfer by the Communist authorities of the SS barracks in Birkenau and the "Old Theatre" building in Auschwitz to the Church in the 1980s, controversies associated with the location of the cross from the Papal Mass of 1979 on a gravel heap near the campsite, controversies surrounding the activities of Stowarzyszenie Ofiar Wojny, War Victim Association, NGO claiming to seek the compensations i.a. for the deported and deprived of property inhabitants of the villages seized for the extension of the concentration camp) to one side, as they are highly debatable and do not directly concern the Museum's operation.

In 2005–2009 a legal dispute arose over one of the suitcases preserved in the collections of the Museum. These suitcases some of which are presented in the main exhibition—belonged to Jewish people deported from Western Europe to Auschwitz and murdered there. Many of them still bear the names and sometimes the addresses of their owners. The Museum lent one such suitcase to an exhibition organised by the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris. A visitor to this exhibition, Michel Levi-Leleu, recognised on it the name and the Paris address of his father, Pierre Levi, who had been deported to Auschwitz, and demanded its return (Report 2006, pp. 30-31). The Museum referred to its title to the use of the property of the camp's victims, as well as its legal obligation to maintain the integrity and original character of both the camp and the relics located therein. The court case was settled in 2009: the suitcase was to remain as a deposit in the Jewish Museum in Paris for 25 years, and the Levi-Leleu family withdrew its claims (Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2009a; Auslander 2010; Bandle, Contel, and Renold 2012). This case led the Museum's directors to adopt stricter principles regarding the loan of movable relics. The settlement was of such fundamental importance because any consent to the restitution of items that the deported had brought to Auschwitz could have a very deleterious effect on the exhibition's collections. In the case of collection of the works of art this would—although with a heavy heart still have been acceptable. However, in the case of a unique collection of genocide evidence like this, whose importance considerably exceeds that of a normal exhibition, this would



Collections department: the exhibition room for study groups. The original gas chamber door, kept in a safe environment glass-case. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

severely damage its integrity. The inevitable competition on the antiques market for objects coming from places of mass murder would then rise to unpredictable levels.

In 2013, the Museum received a part of barrack No. 30 (the infirmary camp) from section BIIb of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp, which the Holocaust Museum in Washington had borrowed in 1993 (Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2013; Ministry of Culture and National Heritage Communiqué 2014). The fact of the loan was unique in itself. The object had been in the US temporarily, but the return was significantly delayed. It was not possible for the Museum to consent to an extension of the loan: an amendment to Polish law permitted the permanent loan of museum exhibits abroad only if to do so did not prejudice the nation's cultural heritage, and in other cases the loan of monuments outside Poland was permitted for no longer than five years (Monuments Care Act 2003; Monuments Care Act 2010).

The dispute with Dina Gottlieb-Babbit, a former prisoner of Auschwitz-Birkenau, lasted much longer. Dina Gottliebová was deported from the Theresienstadt ghetto and ended up in Birkenau in 1943. At the time of her imprisonment Josef Mengele commanded her to document in watercolours the state of the Roma prisoners at the Zigeunerlager where he carried out his experiments. According to Mengele, such work would better reflect the skin colour than photography (Dina Babbit Obituary 2009); another Czech prisoner also made watercolour portraits of the prisoners subjected to experiments (Klee 2005, p. 446). This was undoubtedly part of the documentation of the pseudo-anthropological research that Mengele conducted in the camp, compare (Klee 2005, pp. 432-442, 446-447, 468-469; Weindling 2001, p. 46). Seven such portraits (signed by the author) survived the war, and in 1963 a former prisoner gave one to the Museum. The author was identified only after several years, in 1973. During a visit to the camp Dina Babbit received photocopies of her work, but there was no question of returning the originals (Dina Babbit Obituary 2009). Dina Babbit requested that her watercolours be returned to her, a demand she repeated many times thereafter, but she always met with refusal, despite the various interventions undertaken on her behalf, including in the US Congress (S.Con.Res.54 1999; H.Con.Res.162 1999; Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 1999a; IAC IV 2001). The Museum's position on returning the watercolours was clear: due to the obligation to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the relics at the camp as well as the related documentation (including Mengele's activities), it was deemed impossible to return the works or replace them with copies, as the Museum risked being exposed to accusations of fabricating the documentation of German crimes (Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 1999a; Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 1999b; IAC XVII 2009; Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2009b).

One crisis in the Museum's recent history came with the notorious theft of the "Arbeit macht frei" sign which tops the camp gate—the world-famous symbol of Auschwitz and of Germany's crimes more generally. The thieves entered the camp unnoticed early in the morning of December 18, 2009, and managed to remove, cut up and take away the inscription to a hiding place several hundred kilometres away. Within three days the police found the inscription and caught the perpetrators, but the damage proved difficult to repair, and the case sparked widespread revulsion (Report 2009, pp. 18– 19; IAC Communiqué 2009; Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2009d; Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2009c; Auschwitz

Museum Communiqué 2010a). The gang of Polish thieves was acting in collusion with a Swede who had neo-Nazi links; he was also arrested and sentenced to imprisonment. The alleged Swedish mastermind of the theft was cleared of these charges by a Swedish prosecutor. The sign, which had been damaged during the theft, was temporarily replaced by a copy (which had been made a few years earlier to replace the original during conservation). The inscription was repaired using original materials which had been stored in the camp since liberation; the repairs were preceded by a meticulous analysis of the object and the damage done to it (Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2011). Although a separate investigation, aimed at establishing whether the theft had been made easier by a possible dereliction of duty, was discontinued, it was obvious that safety procedures had to be reviewed (Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2010b). Issues concerning the security of the camp and its visitors remain a top priority with regard to protection against similar or less important thefts, as well as the visitors' security, especially during commemorations of the anniversary of the camp's liberation.

Another challenge was the replacement of the national exhibitions and the preparation of a new main exhibition. The national exhibitions (which had been initiated by the International Auschwitz Council) were opened successively in the 60s and 70s, but they required modernisation; and in some cases, the states which prepared them had since ceased to exist (Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Yugoslavia).

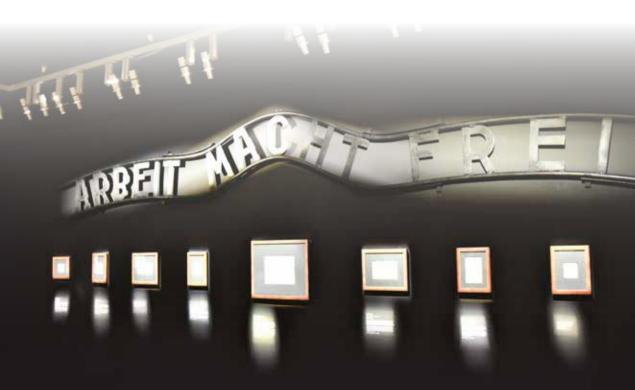
Among the issues causing a stir among public opinion in Poland was the problem of preparing a new exhibition on the Polish inmates of Auschwitz, as well as certain provisions concerning the rules for visitors.

The exhibitions in Block 15 (the Polish national exhibition) and Block 11 (the so-called Death Block) in Auschwitz I are of particular interest to Polish public opinion. The Polish national exhibition was prepared in 1985, that is during the Communist dictatorship, and so it naturally had to be updated to reflect the present conditions. Unfortunately, work on the new national exhibition has only just begun: in 2010 an initial concept for the new exhibition was prepared, and in spring 2018 work was still continuing on the outline of the exhibition, which was to have served as the sole basis for estimating the costs of its construction (Szafrański 2018). The lack of a new Polish national exhibition, as the other national exhibitions have already been renovated, is particularly painful.

Block 11 of Auschwitz I camp, known as the Death Block (the HQ of the *Politische Abteilung*, the camp's *Gestapo*) occupies a special place in Polish memory: this was the camp's inner prison, which held those prisoners whom the Germans suspected of wanting to escape, or participating in the camp's resistance movements, kept as hostages, etc. Many Polish political prisoners were thrown into Block 11 and then executed in its courtyard (at present there is a reconstructed target on the site, at which delegations lay wreaths during official ceremonies). Block 11 was also the seat of the German special court (*Sondergericht*) which in serial "trials" sentenced the members of the Polish resistance from Upper Silesia who were transported, detained and killed there. Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe OFM was also killed in Block 11, as were over 5000 other Polish patriots.

There were two exhibitions in Block 11; the one on the ground floor showed the fate of the Polish victims of the *Sondergericht* as well as other victims of the Death Block, and the one on the first floor (opened in 1993) was dedicated to the camp's resistance movement. However, the former exhibition was in poor condition and was closed in mid-May

Restored sign from the entrance gate. November 2017. © Maciej Foks



Exhibition in Block 11 (Death Block): the history of the camp resistance movement. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

2018. Visiting the exhibition on Block 11's first floor was also severely limited, due to the building's poor technical condition. In place of the exhibition dedicated to the victims of the Death Block, in June 2018 an exhibition of charts and boards on the camp's resistance movement was set up, presenting its history with a significant emphasis on the role of Polish political prisoners, including Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki and other Polish Army officers. However, it must be said that in the absence of a comprehensive new Polish national exhibition, this is only a preliminary step in commemorating the fate of the Poles in Auschwitz; nor has there been a full exhibit concerning the fate of the victims of Block 11 (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage Communiqué 2018a; Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2018a).

The closure of the exhibition on the victims of Block 11 met with protest, including from Dr. Adam Cyra, a historian involved in commemorating the victims of the Sondergericht, as well as the relatives of the victims; they claimed that the old exhibition about the resistance movement was closed to visitors, the exhibition on the victims of Block 11 had been



removed, equipment (the prison bunk beds) that was supposed to remain there in situ had been removed, and that inscriptions made by prisoners before execution had been destroyed or rendered inaccessible. For an overview of the position and the correspondence, see (Kwiecień 2018; Płotnicka 2018a; Cyra 2018a; Museum's response 2018; Płotnicka 2018b; Klistała 2018a; Kempa 2018; Płotnicka 2018c; Cyra 2018b; Klistała 2018b; Klistała 2018c; Cyra 2018c; Cyra 2018d; Klistała 2018d; Klistała 2018e). According to the Museum, the original equipment from Block 11 had been transferred to Blocks 2 and 3 for conservation work with the emphasis that they were not the original items located in Block 11 during the camp's operation (the items had been repeatedly displaced since liberation, and in most cases it was not possible to determine where they had originally been located); the original graffiti in Block 11 were to be documented and submitted for conservation, and their destruction was not an option.

Further controversy was caused by certain regulations of the Memorial Site, including §3 in the rules for visitors, which prohibited (and still prohibits) the bringing into the Memorial Site flags on flagpoles (Regulations 2016; Regulations 2019). In connection with the establishment in 2015 of a so-called quiet zone (Auschwitz Museum Public Events Regulations 2015, point 9) in the courtyard by Block 11 (the Wall of Death), unpleasant rumours began to circulate among the public that it was prohibited "to bring Polish flags into the camp," "to sing the Polish national anthem" or "to celebrate Holy Mass" in Auschwitz (Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2018c). These controversies should be regarded as the result of a misunderstanding which unfortunately led to certain incidents during the commemoration in 2018 of the anniversary of the camp's liberation. (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage Communiqué 2018b; Ministry of Culture and National Heritage Communiqué 2019).

The Museum's current main exhibition has been operating virtually unchanged since 1955. Work on the preparation of a new main exhibition has taken a long time. In December 2006 the International Auschwitz Council adopted a resolution on preparing a new main exhibition (*Report* 2006, pp. 18–19, 38-39), but the letter of intent for its creation and financing was only signed at the beginning of 2016. Work on opening

the new exhibition was then predicted to take 11 years, caused among other factors by the need to restore the buildings in Auschwitz I where the exhibition will be located (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage Communiqué 2015). Currently it is estimated that the whole of the new main exhibition will be open in 2025.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MUSEUM

The Museum's structure is made up of several units (including some which perform purely administrative or technical functions). The tasks of the Museum, including the protection and conservation of the monuments, the documentation and research into the camp's history, organising visits, education and exhibitions, are carried out by several major departments: the Archive (along with the Office for Former Prisoners which acts within its structure), the Digital Repository, the Collection department, the Conservation department, Publishing, the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, the Library, the Research Centre, and finally the section for the Museum Director's representative for the New Core Exhibition (Museum Structure).

The Structures Supervising the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Site's Work and Interactings with the Museum

The structures supervising the work of the Museum are: the International Auschwitz Council to the President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland; the Council of the Museum; and the Council of the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, overseen by the Foundation Council and the International Committee, is closely linked to the Museum's activities. The Foundation for the Remembrance of the Victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau cooperates with the Museum.

The International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust (ICEAH)

The ICEAH was established in 2005 as an integral part of the museum; it is the entity responsible for all educational and promotional activities connected with the Memorial Site (Report 2006, pp. 48–49). The structure of the Centre includes units involved in the organisation of visits (the visitors' service), in exhibitions, in educational projects, the methodology of the guided tours, teaching via the internet (e-learning) and the Volunteer Bureau.

The Research Centre

The Research Centre reports directly to the Director of the Museum; it is the department of the Museum which deals with research into the history of Auschwitz and the preparation of publications. The Centre's Director, Dr. Piotr Setkiewicz, is also the editor of the Museum's academic journal Zeszyty Oświęcimskie.

Information boards inside the camp: Auschwitz I camp admission barrack at the entrace to the camp. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów



The Exhibitions

Since the Memorial Site was opened, in addition to showing visitors the remains of the camp, it was obvious that it would be necessary both to display the evidence of mass murder found in the camp, and to tell the history of its victims. The first exhibition, in Auschwitz I, was developed back in 1947 (Lachendro 2007, p. 43ff., 83ff.; Huener 2003, pp. 59-78); in the following years subsequent elements of Communist propaganda were added to the exhibition (Huener 2003, pp. 92-107; Trojański 2013, pp. 341-342). The thaw after Stalin's death led to the reorganisation of the main exhibition, and it was redeveloped largely from scratch in 1955 (Huener 2003, p. 177ff.). Since the early sixties, the main exhibition has been expanded by opening the socalled national exhibitions, which present the fate of the victims of the extermination, and of the prisoners deported from countries other than Poland. These exhibitions were prepared in cooperation with those countries' governments and veterans' organisations; thus were created, among others, the exhibitions from Czechoslovakia and Hungary (1960), followed later in the 1960s by the Soviet, East German, Yugoslav, Belgian and Danish exhibits (Huener 2003, p. 177), as well as an exhibition on the Holocaust (Huener 2003, pp. 177-184). The 1970s saw the creation of Bulgarian, Austrian and French exhibits, and in the 1980s Dutch, Italian and Polish exhibits (the latter in 1985).

The general assumption behind the exhibition's location and course is that it will run throughout the facilities of Auschwitz I, whereas Auschwitz II-Birkenau will not have any display elements at all (except for the camp bathhouse building, the so-called "Sauna"). Due to the number of visitors and the features of the main exhibition, the Museum recommends using the services of guides.

Another element which makes visiting more convenient is the system of information boards. These have inscriptions in Polish, English and Hebrew, and have been set up at all the major sites; they include historical information, floor plans and photographs. In the places where the buildings no longer exist, stones bearing their numbers have been placed.



Stones with commemorative inscriptions are used to mark the location of the sites of mass murders, as well as the pits into which the Germans poured the victims' ashes. Some of the boards also include QR codes, which make excerpts of accounts by former prisoners available online.

Despite the passage of time, in its outline the main exhibition retains the form given to it in 1955. It occupies Blocks 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11 (the Death Block) in Auschwitz I. The exhibition in Block 4 ("Extermination") was prepared in 1947 in cooperation with the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland and the Central Committee of Polish Jews. It has gone through many changes over the years: it originally included clothes and prosthetic limbs taken from the victims (these are currently in Block 5). Block 4 holds the most shocking element of the exhibition: a collection of hair cut from the bodies of the dead—it is in effect a cemetery. The exhibition in Block 5 ("Evidence of the crime") contains objects found after the liberation of the camp: everyday items which were confiscated from the victims of mass extermination after they arrived in Auschwitz, such as suitcases (many of them with their owners' names and addresses written on them), personal items, shoes, clothes,

Information boards inside the camp: beyond the camp's gate—the place where the camp orchestra played. July 2018.

© Katarzyna Adamów



"...i w Twojej kajędze wszystkie zostaną spisane..." Psalm 139, 16 ועליספרה כלם יכתבו And in your book they all will be written.

KSIĘGA IMION

Nazwiska pomordowanych zostały zapisane w tej księdze na dowód wiecznej pamięci.

ספר השמות

בספר הזה חקוקים שמות הנרצחים לזיכרון עולם.

THE BOOK OF NAMES

The names of the murdered are inscribed in this book as an eternal memorial.

The Book of Names—part of the Shoah exhibition in Block 27. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów



The Book of Names—part of the Shoah exhibition in Block 27. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

1901, Lodz, Poland, Murdered in Lodz, Poland | Zwikiels , Foland, Place of death unknown | Z Lajb, 1897, Lodz, Poland, Murdered in Lodz, Poland Zwikielski, Mosze, Warsaw, Poland, Place of death un Birkenau, Poland | Zwikielski, Moysze, 1910, Pablani Pabianice, Poland, Murdered in Auschwitz, Poland Zwikielski, Rivka, Place of death unknown | Zwikiels Szulem, 1937, Lodz, Poland, Place of death unknown Zwikielski, Yokheved, 1900, Radom, Poland, Murden Auschwitz, Poland | Zwikielster, Szmul, 25/5/1933. Place of death unknown | Zwikl, Saroh, 1881, Simi Friedrich, 2/7/1917, Wien, Austria, Murdered in Birkenau, Poland | Zwikler, Khana, 1896, Swosz Zdroj, Poland, Murdered in Belzec, Poland | Zwi 15/11/1880, Murdered in Nowy Sacz | Zwikler, Murdered in Nowy Sacz, Poland | Zwikler, Murdered in Nowy Sacz | Zwilech, Bluma, P-1and, Place of death unknown | Zwilich, nosc, Poland, Murdered in Belzec, Polar ,04, Zamosc, Poland, Murdered in Belzes Khaim, 1909, Zamosc, Poland, Murdered Radomsko, Poland | Zwilich, Mordekhai, dered in Belzec, Poland | Zw ice of death unknown | Zwil Murdered in Auschwitz Birkena Stryj, Poland, Place of death unknown

Poland, Murdered in Bolechow, Poland Stryj, Poland, Place of death unknow Poland, Place of death unknown | Zo Poland, Place of death unknown | 2 Holasovice, Czechoslovakia, Murder Zwillenberg, Clara, 1893, Berlin, C Birkenau, Poland | Zu

inslaken, German Murdered in Birken hen, 1890, Berlin, Ger ria | Zwillenberg, Kurt serlin, Germany, Murdere Latvia | Zwillenberg, Ver Germany, Murdered in R Zigmund, 1890, Ortelsburg Poland | Zwillich, Cesia, Warsaw, Poland | Zwillich Murdered in Riga, Latvia Poland, Place of death u of death unknown | 4 Murdered in Treblink Boryslaw, Poland, Pla

wat Komarno, Cz

false limbs and dentures and prayer shawls. The exhibition in Block 6 ("Life of prisoners") outlines the treatment of people coming to the camp, and what "everyday life" in the camp looked like. The exhibition in Block 7 ("Living conditions") presents the prisoners' living conditions, including reconstructions of the interior appearance of the blocks in Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. The exhibition in Block 11 (the "Death Block") includes reconstructions of the SS staff room and the room where the sessions of the German Sondergericht were held (to convict Polish political prisoners transported to the Death Block from the Gestapo prison in Mysłowice), the room where the prisoners were held, and an exhibition board showing the activities of the underground organisations in the camp. Visitors can also enter the block's cellars which served as the detention cells of the *Politische Abteilung* (the camp's Gestapo). The buildings containing the gas chambers and the crematorium No. 1 in Auschwitz I camp are also part of the main exhibition. The outline of the main parts of the exhibition is available online (Permanent Exhibition).

In addition to the main exhibition, some buildings in Auschwitz I also house the ten national exhibitions. The exhibition entitled "The Destruction of the European Roma" (on the 1st floor of Block 13), concerns the fate of the 23,000 Roma deported to Auschwitz, most of whom were murdered there; it was prepared by Poland and opened in 2001. The Russian Federation prepared an exhibition on the fate of Soviet prisoners of war and citizens in Auschwitz (as well as the German occupation of the USSR), entitled "Tragedy. Valour. Liberation" (Block 14, opened in 2013), which replaced the exhibition prepared by the USSR. Another exhibition, "The Struggle and Martyrdom of the Polish Nation 1939-1945" was opened in 1985 and is located in Block 15. The former Czechoslovak exhibition was replaced by an exhibition prepared by Slovakia "The Tragedy of the Slovakian Jews" (on the ground floor of Block 16), which was opened in 2002; in the same year the Czech Republic prepared and opened the exhibition "Prisoners from the Czech Lands in Auschwitz Concentration Camp" (first floor in Block 16). The Austrian exhibition in Block 17 is temporarily closed to the public. In 2004 Hungary opened



Exhibition in admission block ("Sauna") of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp: the visitors are walking along the path walked by the inmates—through the rooms where they were deprived of their belongings, shaven, desinfected, medically examined and tattooed with camp numbers. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów



REMEMBRANCE INSTITUTION

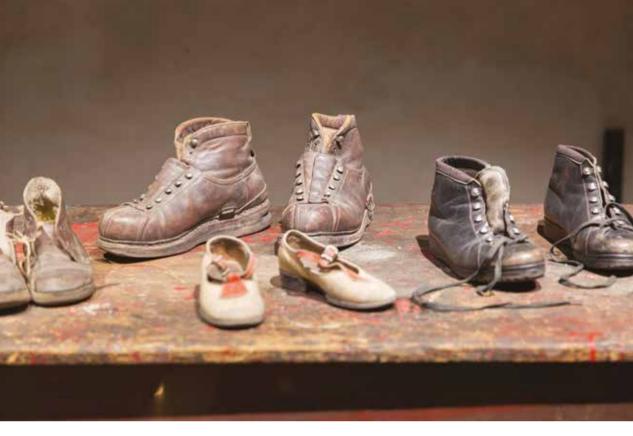
the exhibition "The Citizen Betrayed: A Remembrance of Holocaust Victims from Hungary" (on the first floor of Block 18). On the ground floor of Block 20 is the French exhibition "Deportees from France to Auschwitz Concentration Camp: March 27, 1942–January 27, 1945", which was opened in 2005. On the first floor of the same block is the exhibition from the Kingdom of Belgium, "Belgium 1940–1945. The Occupation and Deportation to Auschwitz Concentration Camp", opened in 2006. In 2005 the Dutch exhibition was opened on the first floor of Block 21; the exhibition "Shoah", prepared by the Yad Vashem, opened in block 27 in 2013.

The only exhibition in Auschwitz II-Birkenau is located in the camp's admission block (the so-called "Sauna"). This building, although it was initially in a good state of preservation (which distinguished it from the rest of the buildings in Birkenau), has deteriorated in the post-war

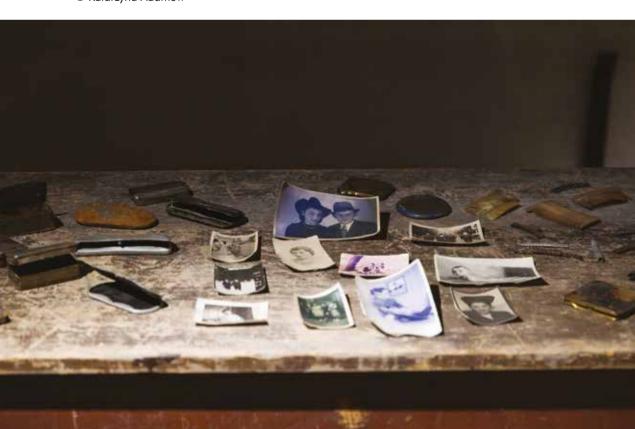
years. After comprehensive maintenance was carried out, the building was re-opened to visitors in 2001 (Świebocka 2008; Auschwitz Museum Communiqué 2001). Visitors pass through the building along the same path which was followed by those prisoners who had passed the selection on arrival at the camp (that is those who had not been designated for extermination). The changing rooms contain a small exhibition of the items confiscated from the deportees. The last room (where the prisoners were tattooed with their camp numbers) holds an exhibition of photograph albums, found in the camp after liberation, belonging to the families deported from the ghettos in Upper Silesia. The idea behind this part of the exhibition was to restore the symbolic identity of the victims of the camp—in a place where they were deprived of their identity, and where their personal belongings, documents and memorabilia were confiscated (the latter were destroyed on the spot).



Renovated admission block in Auschwitz II-Birkenau ("Sauna"): the only permanent exhibition in the Birkenau camp. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów



Exhibition in the admission block ("Sauna") of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp: the personal items of people deported to the camp. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów



The Archives, the Office for Former Prisoners, the Digital Repository

The function of the Museum's Archive goes beyond the classic calling of such institutions: its task is not only to receive, catalogue and document, but also to invoke the sources (accounts and testimonies), to inform interested parties about the fate of the prisoners, and also—significantly—to maintain close contact with the living prisoners.

The Archive was founded after the transfer in 1957 to the Museum of the camp records collected by the Main Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes. It both stores and also constantly acquires archives and documents concerning the history of the camp and the fate of its prisoners. The Archive's first director was Tadeusz Iwaszko. At present the archive's collections include original documentation from the camp (which is actually in a rather fragmentary state) as well as documents produced after the war relating to Auschwitz and its prisoners. The original plan regarding the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's archive was to make it a central institution in Poland for the gathering of documents concerning concentration camps and to provide information about the prisoners.

The greater part of the camp's documentation was destroyed by the Germans days before they abandoned the camp. Some of the documents were hidden and saved by the prisoners: in this way, for example, survived some of the "mug shots" of the prisoners, around 39,000 negatives. The Germans were unable to destroy all of the camp's records before it was evacuated; however we should assume that the files destroyed first were the most important or incriminating. Probably some of the documentation may have been evacuated along with the prisoners and destroyed later. The Red Army took some documents after the camp's liberation and removed them to the USSR, where some of them still remain; however, since 1990 the copies of the camp documents from the Russian archives have been acquired.

Documents were preserved in a more or less fragmentary state from the camp's headquarters, the *Politische Abteilung*, the camp's directorate, the departments for prison labour, administrative and economic affairs, the camp's hospitals, as The Archives and the Office for Former Prisoners: copies of the inmates' questionnaires. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów well as documentation from the SS-Hygieneinstitut and the SS-Zentralbauleitung (the unit coordinating construction work). One important part of the documentation generated during the camp's operation is a collection of photographs which, in addition to the above-mentioned 39,000 images of prisoners, also included pictures from the SS-Zentralbauleitung documenting the construction of the camp, pictures taken by SS troops, as well as a collection of several thousand images (found in the "Sauna" area at Birkenau) belonging to Jews deported to Auschwitz from the ghetto in Będzin. The other collections of documents created during the war in the camp offices in the Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum included material from the various sub-camps in the region.

Two collections in the Archive contain documents produced during the war, but not from the office of the SS: these are collections of letters sent by the prisoners (essentially made up entirely from donations from former prisoners or their families); these are often the only testimony to the imprisonment of some individuals. A collection of documentation on the camp's resistance movement—also preserved in a fragmentary state—includes secret reports smuggled outside Auschwitz camp by the underground organisation, as well as lists of prisoners.



The Museum's archives also hold copies of documents produced in other concentration camps, which contain information about the prisoners of Auschwitz: these are mostly lists of prisoners transferred to other concentration camps. The Archive's collections also house some of the original files from KL Mauthausen, which were retained by Polish prisoners during the camp's liquidation in May 1945, as well as copies of some files from KL Buchenwald (obtained from the archives of the Polish Red Cross). A mention should also be made of the copies of the transport lists of Jews deported to Auschwitz from France, the Netherlands, the Protectorate of Bohemia & Moravia and Berlin.

Post-war documentation is a major part of the Archive's collection: the records include the files of trial of Auschwitz's commandant Rudolf Höss (held in Warsaw from March 11, to April 2, 1947), and the trials of the SS personnel who worked at Auschwitz (Warsaw, November 24—December 22, 1947). The direct post-war effects of the camp's operation are covered in documentation from the camp's hospitals, which were set up after liberation by the Polish Red Cross in the former Auschwitz I camp and in the towns of Oświęcim and Brzeszcze.

The Archives and the Office for Former Prisoners: the main index. The card-index contains about two milion cards, mirroring every mention of prisoners in the Archive's records. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów





The Archives and the Office for Former Prisoners: the main index. The card-index contains about two milion cards, mirroring every mention of prisoners in the Archive's records. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

Of unique historic significance are the collections of testimonies (comprising around 1500 units) and narratives (around 3500) by the former prisoners. These narratives were gathered by virtually all divisions of the Museum during their research work: since the creation of the Office of Former Prisoners, these narratives have been recorded exclusively by the Archive. A collection of testimonies was published as the result of an announcement in 1960 of a regular literary competition based on the prisoners' testimonies (the submitted works were placed in the Archives). The collection of narratives and testimonies has been supplied with two electronic finding aids, an index of authors and a thematic index. These indexes are available to researchers and to museum employees. Work is underway on a third electronic index of people mentioned in the testimonies and narratives (the Museum also has a "classic" paper index).

In addition to the above-mentioned photographs from before 1945, the Archive houses a collection of post-war photographs (numbering around 30,000 images), predominantly taken inside the camp, and mostly derived from collections provided by former prisoners. The audiovisual collection includes audio recordings of prisoners' accounts, as well as copies of films produced at the former camp (Auschwitz Archival Resources). Another of the Archive's activities is the collecting and receiving of documentation on the camp from all available sources: often these are family legacies offered to the Museum. In addition, the antiquarian market represents another source of acquisitions apart from donations.

Because of their condition and the need to protect them, the original documents are shown to researchers in digitised form only. The documentation is digitised by the Digital Repository, an entity of the Museum which is independent of the Archives. The Digital Repository also maintains a central database, both of data concerning the prisoners (in alphabetical order and by their numbers) and of SS personnel (these databases are available to employees of the Museum only). The Digital Repository is also responsible for scanning and indexing the digitised documents and objects in its databases; at present the Archive only digitises obtained documents. Apart from the Repository and the Archive, digitisation work is also carried out by the Museum's conservation department.

The central database corresponds to the Archive's main index, an alphabetical directory of the prisoners and a directory of their numbers. These files, which in 2018 amounted to two million cards, and which have been continuously expanded since 1957, are basically an index of the documents stored in the Archive: any mention of a prisoner (or his number) corresponds to a card on file. The card-index together with the central database, are the most important tool in the Archive's Office for Former Prisoners.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has also recently gained access to the database of the International Tracing Service at Bad Arolsen (*Auschwitz Museum Communiqué* 2018b). The Museum's website also contains a search engine for information concerning the camp's former prisoners (*Auschwitz Prisoners Online Database*).

The development of electronic systems for storing the data and digitising the documentation is only a part of the ongoing work to modernise the Archive's operations. In 2014–2015 extensive renovation of Block 24 in the Auschwitz I camp, which houses the archive, was carried out; the structure of the building was reinforced and modern security systems were installed. In the future there are plans to transfer the Archive and the Collections department to a new building outside the former camp.

The ethos of the Archive includes maintaining close contact with former prisoners and their families. A significant part of the Archive's work since the beginning of its operation has been to provide information about the camp's prisoners to people who want to learn about their fate, mostly their families. This work is undertaken by the Office for Contact with Former Prisoners, which is the unit within the Archive's structure responsible for contact between the Museum and those camp victims who are still alive (and their families). The Office receives about 4000 inquiries annually about former inmates. The task of the Office's employees is to check the data resources available to the Museum and provide comprehensive information. An important tool for this work is the index of the former prisoners, which is being systematically expanded. The office maintains contact with the surviving former prisoners of Auschwitz—both those living in Poland and those from the rest of the world about whom they have information; at present there are just a few hundred such people. Among those living in Poland, the largest group are the youngest prisoners—the children deported during the Warsaw Rising in 1944, as well as a few who were even born in the camp; from the rest of the world, they are mostly children who were deported from the Łódź ghetto in 1944. The Office's duties also include maintaining direct contact with people visiting the Memorial Site who wish to obtain information about former prisoners, providing information about them, and depositing documents in the archives. These enquirers include many relatives of the victims, often former prisoners. Information can be exchanged by means of a contact form, available on site at the Office as well as on the Museum's website (Bureau for Former Prisoners Site).

The Collections

Over 90,000 objects remaining from the camp's activity are currently in the care of the Museum's collections department. The vast majority of these are things stolen from the murdered deportees, but which could not be sent for reuse in Germany. They were found after the evacuation of the camp and the liberation of the prisoners, ranging from suitcases (around 4000, of which 2100 bear the names and sometimes addresses of their owners), shoes (occupying around 40,000 m³), kitchenware and other everyday utensils (around 12,000 items), ranging from prayer shawls (246), clothes, to glasses and other personal items including 470 artificial limbs and dentures.

A significant amount of these objects—that are essentially material evidence of mass murder—is included in the exhibition. In addition, the collection includes numerous movable objects either found in the camp or gifted to the Museum. These are mainly objects which were used by both the prisoners and the camp staff, including prisoners' uniforms (the so-called "stripes", many of which were gifts from former prisoners), furniture and fittings from the barracks, uniforms and pieces of SS equipment. An important place in the collection is taken by objects related to the extermination process: the moving parts of the gas chambers and crematoria, and cans of Zyklon B (the details of this collection and images of some of the objects are available online: Historical Collection).

A special place among the objects stored in the Museum goes to the works of art (or "artistic objects") that were found in the camp or donated to the museum by former prisoners.

Collections department: the exhibition room for study groups. The specimens are drawn from the collection of artworks created in camp or by the former inmates. July 2018.

© Katarzyna Adamów





Collections department: the index of items kept. Drawers with inventory cards concerning drawings, sculptures, numismatics, placards and looted property. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

The Museum holds around 4100 art objects, of which more than 2000 were made by former prisoners. Their artistic value is varied, and their historical value is sometimes difficult to determine. These items include portraits of Roma prisoners by Dina Gottlieb (see above), lithographic stones for duplicating pictorial handbooks for the SS-men on guard duty, a model of Auschwitz I (taking its planned expansion into account) and finally paintings made by prisoners at the request of the SS personnel, or done secretly. Making art to an SS-Mann's order may seem controversial: paintings done at "private" request (despite the ban issued by the camp commandant), paintings cleansed of violence and any sign of coercion, scenes from the construction of the camp's new blocks or the workshops, or documenting the progress of diseases in the Roma prisoners, etc., could seem aesthetically and ethically questionable. But the prisoner-artist's creativity was a tactic for survival, and in addition it was not linked to decreasing the chances of survival for other inmates. The boundary of the ethical function of art in the camp was trespassed by the Germans' creation



Collections department: the index of items kept. An index card of an item. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów



Collections department: the suitcase warehouse. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

in Auschwitz of an "exhibition" on the cultures of nations, all of whose items were made by the prisoners (and which were supposed to show their "inferiority" to German culture). The preserved works of art made by the prisoners secretly gained an additional resonance: their preparation risked immediate punishment; but this creativity, even the smallest, was an attempt by the prisoners to maintain their identity and dignity. The Museum's publisher has printed several books of the prisoners' work (Cierpienie 1989; Kupiec 2003; Kupiec 2007; Kupiec 2008; Bajki 2009; Sketchbook 2011; Face to face 2017; Favole 2017; Forbidden 2012; Sieradzka 2018).

The artistic objects also include artworks created and provided by former prisoners after the war. These include Józef Szajna, a former prisoner at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and Maria Hiszpańska-Neumann, a painter and former prisoner at Ravensbrück.

All of the movable objects are catalogued on the card index (research documentation and storage). The research index has also been digitised.

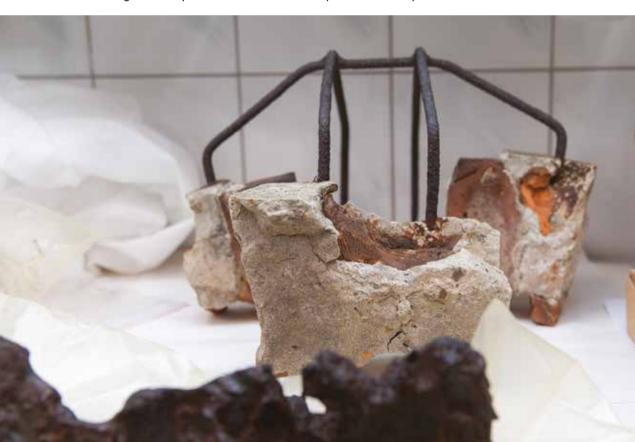
In recent years the Museum's activities have brought significant changes in the operation of the collections department. The buildings where the stored objects are preserved have been equipped with modern fire-fighting equipment and systems for controlling the local climate conditions, and a special warehouse for the suitcases and textile objects (prayer shawls and clothes) has been constructed (Report 2013, pp. 18–19).

Conservation: the Fight against Time and Nature

Whereas the preservation, restoration and conservation of the documents in the archive and the thousands of various objects stored in the museum is a major challenge, maintaining the existence of the other camp barracks and ruins is even more so. A specific feature of the conservation tasks at the Memorial Site is the work with objects, most of which were not intended to be permanent, or which were made of perishable materials and using technology that does



Conservation laboratory: conserved fragments of the gas chamber installations and crematorium oven. The rods secured the ventilation ducts in gas chambers from being blocked by bodies of the murdered. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów





Conservation laboratory: conserved fragments of the gas chamber installations and crematorium oven. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów





Conservation laboratory: conservation of a victim's suitcase. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów





Conservation laboratory: conservation of some items found in the camps premises. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

not guarantee durability. For instance, temporary buildings and everyday objects are prone to damage over time, or become partially damaged through normal use, as they were not originally intended to be preserved. This confronts the conservators at the Museum's laboratory with many challenges, of a kind which an expert used to dealing with artworks is not usually confronted with. The conservator's classic tasks—removing harmful items from an object, preserving it, returning it to a near-original condition, filling in cavities—here take on additional difficulties, beginning from determining the composition and structure of the objects considered, and ending with developing the technologies necessary to maintain their condition, or at least to slow down their deterioration.

The second major challenge for the Museum's conservation department is the diversity of tasks it faces: from preparing and conducting or supervising the maintenance work on the buildings, through to the conservation of a variety of objects; such as items for everyday use, equipment used in the buildings, pieces of equipment, items of clothing, up to the preservation of documents. It is therefore necessary to use a very broad spectrum of methods for research,



prospecting of items and its conservation; and sometimes to develop entirely new methods of conservation. Work with objects that have been subjected to various conservation treatments several decades previously often requires the development of new methods of conservation and the removal of old maintenance materials (so-called secondary conservation).

The work of the conservation department is divided on the basis of the nature of the objects requiring protection or recovery: the conservation of permanent objects (buildings), carried out *in situ*, is distinguished from the conservation of movable objects (carried out in the laboratory).

Obtaining more serious funding was a condition for carrying out maintenance of a more complex nature. The Museum's own resources, which were previously rather modest, and the subsidies from individual donors allowed the preservation of single objects, see (Report 2007, pp. 30–31), but rarely of entire collections, such as the documentation from the SS-*Hygieneinstitut* that was conducted by the regional government of North Rhine-Westphalia (Report 2007, pp. 30–31). Before 2013 significant planning and inventory work was carried out to determine the specific needs

Auschwitz II-Birkenau: the brick barracks—of feeble structure and built on the wetland—need substantially greater renovation efforts than wooden barracks. July 2018.

© Katarzyna Adamów

and challenges in the field of maintenance; this especially concerned the buildings at the Auschwitz II-Birkenau site, which were most vulnerable to destruction (see Report 2006, pp. 24-26; Report 2007, pp. 28-29).

The Global Conservation Plan adopted in 2013 captures the priorities of conservation work, especially the protection of 45 brick barracks in sector BI of Auschwitz II-Birkenau, which are extremely unstable structures. An additional challenge was the nature of the land on which the Birkenau camp was built. The Museum is located on the former meadows and fields of the displaced Polish village of Brzezinka, and most of these meadows turned out to be waterlogged, and so were unfit for the erection of permanent structures; the Germans had already encountered this problem (Report 2006, p. 26; Report 2007, pp. 28-29). The wet land and the poor construction of the brick barracks mean that maintaining the latter is extremely difficult and expensive. The starting point was a hydrological survey and inventory of this part of Birkenau, a detailed examination of the state of some of the most endangered barracks, the cleaning of some canals, and the installation of modern drainage (Master Plan 2014, pp. 22-26; Report 2007, pp. 28-29).

At the same time a number of scientific projects were launched, whose objective was to study the natural processes degrading buildings and their individual parts, and to identify the materials used in their original construction. This was conducted with the aim of developing technologies to preserve masonry, layers of paint, metal elements, and to protect and preserve the endangered buildings, including the wooden barracks (Master Plan 2014, p. 20; Report 2007, pp. 28-29). Carrying out maintenance work on the wooden barracks (which were portable military stables adapted during the war) turned out to be significantly easier and cheaper than maintaining the brick barracks.

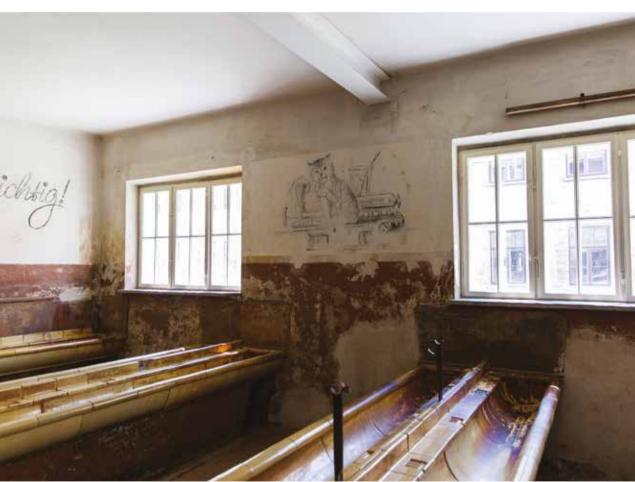
Previously, that is before 2013, an inventory was conducted at Auschwitz I and plans were prepared for the overall maintenance of Block 28 (the camp hospital and morgue), and the remains of the former camp kitchen (and bath) between Blocks 1 and 2 were preserved (Master Plan 2014 pp. 16–18).

In 2010-2013 the total conservation of Blocks 2 and 3 in Auschwitz I was carried out. These blocks are not open to the



Block 2 in the Auschwitz I camp (the 'conservation reserve'): prisoners' washroom with wall decorations praising personal cleaness. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów

general public, and are being transformed into a conservation reserve (accessible to study groups only). The aim of this work was not only to improve the condition of the objects and protect them, but also to maintain their authenticity (for example, post-war reconstruction was removed and further renovation was ruled out). This meant carrying out construction work not only to secure the building, but also the condition of its smallest components. Maintaining the building's interior intact required not only the development of techniques aimed at the preservation of items which are perishable and not usually subjected to such treatment, but also the slowing of the ageing process, or applying conservation methods normally applied in artworks to layers



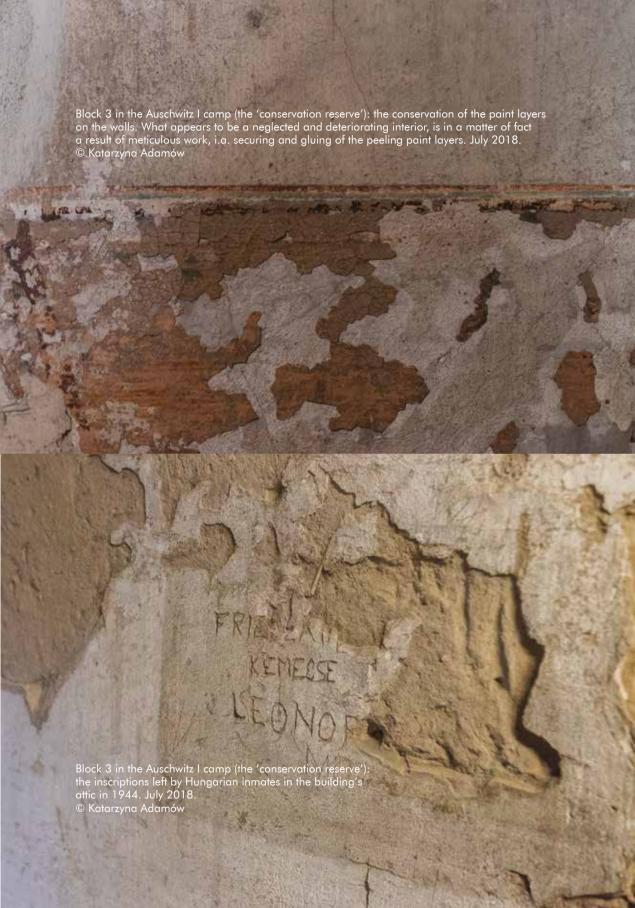
of paint which are artistically worthless. Another challenge was installing equipment designed to maintain the proper temperature and humidity without significantly affecting the building structures. Maintaining the selected blocks was intended not only to save them from destruction, but also (as intended) to return them to a state as close to their original condition as possible. The principles and progress of the conservation work and its effects are available for review online (Preserve Authenticity 2013).

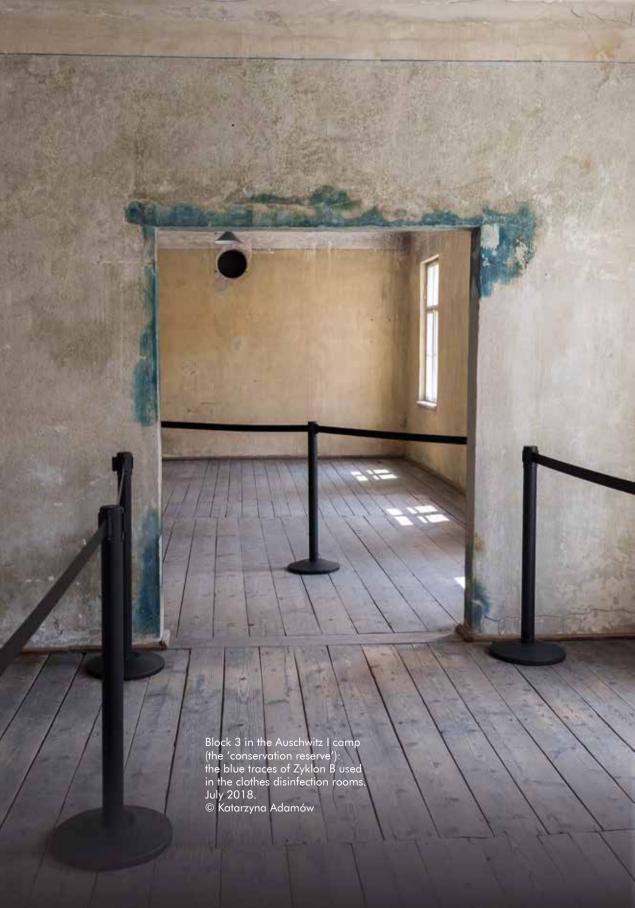
A significant number of the conservation activities has been financed by the European Union, including the conservation of wooden barracks B-154 and B-159 in Auschwitz II-Birkenau, the archaeological research and hydrological

Blocks 2 and 3 and the remnants of the camp kitchen in Auschwitz Ithe 'conservation reserve'. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów











research at Brzezinka, and the conservation and adaptation of the building known as the Old Theatre (Adaptation). This project has also financed the equipping of specialised laboratories in the conservation department. Other grants have helped with projects including the preservation of the collection of children's shoes, the SS-Hygieneinstitut's archive unit, the conservation of the ruins of the barracks and the ruins of crematoria II and III at Birkenau (Preserving Authenticity; Preservation Projects).

Block 3 in the Auschwitz I camp (the 'conservation reserve'): conservation of the wooden elements such as doors was focused on preserving the original paint layers and even damage as a result of their everyday use during the camp's operation. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów



The Conservation Laboratory

The Museum's Conservation department runs one of the largest, if not the largest conservation laboratory in Poland. Importantly, the department's working methods set the standard for the work of similar institutions all across Europe; so in fact, this is a reference institution.

Conservation laboratory: photographic documentation of the renovated items. July 2018.

© Katarzyna Adamów



Since 2004 the conservation laboratory has been housed in the former prisoners' reception building at Auschwitz I. The expansion of the laboratory and the employment of professional conservators there began in 2002. The maintenance department interacts with academic centres in Toruń and Cracow. Conservation and rescue operations had been carried out before: many objects, especially the portable ones, had already been secured in the 1950s, most often in connection with their being sent to exhibitions outside the museum (this practice was later abandoned).

The laboratory procedure includes the photographic documentation of the object's state before conservation, a professional study of its composition and structure (including X-ray spectrometry), and the identification of the original material and the materials used for example during later conservation, repairs, etc. After the conservation has been completed, the objects are photographed again to document their condition. The process of conserving each

Conservation laboratory: conservation of the camp orchestra notes. July 2018. © Katarzyna Adamów



object is then documented. Depending on the object type and the maintenance planned for them, the items go to either the "dry" or the "wet" laboratory.

Research Opportunities

For researchers, it is most important to have access to the records in the archives at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. It should be emphasised that in principle this is the most important collection of documentation relating to Auschwitz in Poland, incomparably greater than the resources of the other museum-memorial sites which preserve the remains of the other concentration camps currently located in Poland (Majdanek, Stutthof, Gross-Rosen).

Another important area of the Museum's activity which offers the opportunity for significant research is the operation of the conservation department: maintaining the buildings, the terrain and the movable objects requires the use of modern technologies and conservation, architectural and archaeological methods. To learn about these activities and take part in them, it is required to enter into specialist cooperation with the Museum.

The Museum organises and co-organises conferences, seminars and academic sessions (*Educational Projects*), and also organises two postgraduate courses in cooperation with two universities in Cracow: "Totalitarianism-Nazism-Holocaust" (in collaboration with the Pedagogical University) and "Christian-Jewish Relations" (in collaboration with the John Paul II Pontifical University) (*Postgraduate Studies*).

The Museum also organises study visits for in-depth exploring—mostly for young people, as well as for interested scholars and popularisers (*Study visits*).

Since 1957 the Museum has published an academic journal, *Zeszyty Oświęcimskie*. There has been a German version since 1959, *Hefte von Auschwitz*; and also a version in English since 2012 entitled *Auschwitz Studies*.

The Museum's library catalogue, numbering around 30,000 volumes, is available online (*Auschwitz Museum Library Online Catalogue*). The Museum also offers an online list of scholar publications by the Research Centre's staff (*Bibliography*).

Volunteer Work

Volunteering plays an important role in the Museum's operations, and is treated as an element of its educational work. Volunteering in the museum is coordinated by the ICEAH. The volunteers (mostly young people) are employed to perform various maintenance tasks that do not require major skills. It should be noted that volunteers are present in almost all of the structures of the Museum.

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