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## The Deportation of Roma to Auschwitz before the Founding of the *Zigeunerlager* in the Light of the Extant Documents

There are relatively few documents in the Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum that shed light on the deportation of Roma to Auschwitz Concentration Camp before February 26, 1943, when the so-called *Zigeunerlager* (Gypsy Camp) opened in Birkenau. Sets of records created by the camp administrative office that note the nationality of prisoners are the primary source for attempts at establishing the number of such deportees. However, many documents omit this information or identify prisoners only by their state affiliation. This means that not all archival items are of use.

The partially extant lists of newly arrived prisoners (*Zugangslisten*), drawn up on the basis of the personal-information forms completed at registration, are relevant. These lists have survived mainly for the period from January to December 1941. Aside from first and last name and date and place of birth, they record the prisoner's camp number, nationality, the category under which the prisoner is classified, and the prisoner's occupation. The lists indicate that Roma were deported to Auschwitz beginning in July 1941. They obtained numbers from the so-called main prisoner series, and the following abbreviations for imprisonment categories (*Haftart*) are present: *Aso. D.* (German asocial prisoner), *Aso. Prot.* (asocial prisoner from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia), *Schutzb. P.* (Polish political prisoner), and *Schutzb. Stls.* (stateless political prisoner). The information that the prisoner is a Roma is usually indicated in the space for "occupation" (*Beruf*) by the abbreviations *Z.*, *Zig.* or the entire word *Zigeuner*.<sup>1</sup>

Relatively few of the personal-information forms (*Häftlingspersonalbogen*) completed during the registration of new prisoners, in part on the basis of oral declarations, have come down to us. These forms contain detailed information on individual prisoners and, more importantly, indicate nationality. In some of them, *ar. Zig.* (Aryan Gypsy) is noted under "race."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (hereafter: APMA-B). *Zugangslisten*, D-AuI-2/1, vol. I–V, pp. 259, 264, 323, 457, 471, 472.

<sup>2</sup> APMA-B. *Häftlingspersonalbogen*, D-AuI-2/4749/34, vol. 33, p. 71; vol. 34, p. 92.

Scattered entries noting that a prisoner is a Roma can also be found in the personal file cards (*Häftlings-Personal-Karten*)<sup>3</sup> and in the prisoner labor assignment forms<sup>4</sup> drawn up by the camp labor department.

Another source to fill out our knowledge about the presence of Roma in Auschwitz is the daily prisoner population books (*Stärkebücher*) containing entries from January to August 1942. They noted the population of the camp as counted at morning and evening roll call by the name, camp number, category, and nationality of male prisoners who died, were transferred, escaped, or were released from the camp. Several entries note the deaths of Roma prisoners.<sup>5</sup>

Also taken into account were telegrams about prisoner escapes, in which the office of the Auschwitz commandant informed the Reich Main Security Office and the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps about escapes and asked for the help of the so-called eastern posts of the state, criminal, and border police in searching for the fugitives.<sup>6</sup> Several of these telegrams mention escapes by Roma.

Some information can also be found in the prisoner card file from block 11<sup>7</sup> and the camp jail record books, known as the “Bunker Books,” covering the period from January 1941 to February 1944.<sup>8</sup>

Of interest to us are the extremely rare entries in the records of the camp hospitals—the record books of hospital blocks no. 20<sup>9</sup> and no. 28<sup>10</sup> in the main camp—and the X-ray records. These books note the first and last names and camp numbers of prisoners admitted to these hospital blocks or examined by X-ray, along with the first letter of their nationality.<sup>11</sup>

The analysis of these archival fonds indicate that only a few prisoners figure in each one who are marked as Roma by the entry of the letter *Z*, the abbreviation *Zig*, or the word *Zigeuner*. A total of over thirty people are designated in this way.

Information of exceptional relevance to the subject comes from the transport lists of asocial prisoners sent to Auschwitz by the criminal police of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in the years 1942–1944.

<sup>3</sup> APMA-B. *Häftlings-Personal-Karten*, D-AuI-3a/88-407, pp. 321, 505; *Ibid.*, D-AuI-3a/1365-1684, p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> APMA-B. Employment department files, D-AuI-3a/2906-3158, vol. 10, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> APMA-B. *Stärkebücher*, D-AuI-3/1, vol. 1/2, pp. 389, 425; *Ibid.*, D-AuI-3/2, vol. 2, pp. 38, 155.

<sup>6</sup> APMA-B. Telegrams about escapes, IZ-8/Gestapo Łódź/3, vol. 3, pp. 32, 122; vol. 4, pp. 15–16.

<sup>7</sup> APMA-B. Block 11 prisoner card file, D-AuI-3, pp. 492, 567, 1064, 1491, 1574.

<sup>8</sup> APMA-B. Bunker book, D-AuI-3/2, vol. 2, pp. 14, 28.

<sup>9</sup> APMA-B. Block 20 hospital book, D-AuI-5/1a, vol. 1, pp. 56, 82, 95, 101.

<sup>10</sup> APMA-B. Block 28 hospital book, D-AuI-5/7, vol. 1, pp. 80, 87.

<sup>11</sup> APMA-B. *Röntgenbuch*, D-AuI-5, vol. 12, p. 42; vol. 14, p. 77.

The originals are in the District State Archives in Brno. They indicate that seven transports containing Roma prisoners were dispatched from Brno to Auschwitz in the period of interest to us here. They all arrived in 1942—on April 29, May 20, June 17, August 14, November 3, and December 7 and 23, and carried a total of 132 Roma.<sup>12</sup> The arrival of a transport carrying only Roma—60 men and 31 women—on December 7, 1942, was confirmed by a telegram sent the following day, which also contains the information that one of them, Franc Danhel (*Asozialer Tschechischer Zigeuner*—an “asocial Czech Gypsy”) turned up missing when the prisoners were counted at the train station in Auschwitz.<sup>13</sup> All efforts to locate him failed.

A memo by the SS officer on duty indicates that a larger group of Roma, numbering 93 people, was sent to Auschwitz on December 3, 1942.<sup>14</sup> SS-Hauptscharführer Heuger was behind the desk and noted that a detachment of SS men was sent to the Auschwitz train station at noon to escort a Roma transport. The subsequent fate of these people is not known; the camp records contain no mention of the transport. They probably all died in the gas chamber.<sup>15</sup>

A transport of 515 women and 1,477 men from Cracow and other places in southern Poland arrived in Auschwitz on January 28, 1943. There were Poles, Jews, and Roma among the deportees. As established by the authors of the *Księga Pamięci. Transporty Polaków do KL Auschwitz z Krakowa i innych miejscowości Polski południowej 1940–1944* [Memorial book: transports of Poles to Auschwitz from Cracow and other places in southern Poland], there were 48 Roma women in the transport. Unfortunately, the lack of any sort of information makes it impossible to identify more than 1,200 of the men in the transport; some of them, as well, must have been Roma.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> APMA-B. Other fonds, *Verzeichnisse der Transporte der Asozialen – Häftlinge aus Brünn und Prag ins Konzentrationslager Auschwitz*, IZ-28/Protektorat Kriminalpolizei – Protectorate Criminal Police/1, pp. 5–25; J. Dębski, J. Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Prześladowania i masowa zagłada Romów podczas II wojny światowej w świetle relacji i wspomnień* [The persecution and mass extermination of Roma during the Second World War in the light of accounts and memoirs], Warsaw 2007, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> APMA-B. Telegrams about escapes, IZ-8/Gestapo Łódź/3, vol. 3, p. 122; *Ibid.*, D-AuI-1/1-278, vol. 1, pp. 13, 21.

<sup>14</sup> APMA-B. Buch des Führers vom Dienst, D-AuI-1/3, p. 154.

<sup>15</sup> J. Parcer, T. Grotum, *Analiza zachowanych dokumentów* [The analysis of the extant documents], in *Los Cyganów w KL Auschwitz-Birkenau* [The fate of Gypsies in Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp], Oświęcim 1994, p. 185.

<sup>16</sup> *Księga Pamięci. Transporty Polaków do KL Auschwitz z Krakowa i innych miejscowości Polski południowej 1940–1944*, vol. III, F. Piper, I. Strzelecka (eds.), Warsaw—Oświęcim 2002, pp. 1728–1755; vol. IV, pp. 2383–2388.

Similarly, the Security Police and Security Service sent 1,282 people from the Cracow District to Auschwitz on a transport that probably arrived on February 16, 1943. Fifty-one of the women and fourteen of the men were Roma. Personal information on more than 500 of the people is unavailable.<sup>17</sup>

The Roma in both these transports came from the vicinity of Nowy Sącz, Stary Sącz, Mszana Dolna, Limanowa, and Nowy Targ in occupied southern Poland. The overwhelming majority of them died in the camp.<sup>18</sup>

On the basis of the extant original sources and secondary sources we can estimate that the lowest possible figure for the number of Roma deported to Auschwitz before the creation of the *Zigeunerlager* was about 370. It is possible that higher numbers of Roma were sent to the camp during this period, but the extensive lacunae in the documentation makes this impossible to confirm.

Accounts and memoirs by former prisoners also contain mentions of the presence of Roma in Auschwitz in the first years after the opening of Auschwitz. Generally these prisoner narrators write about matters or events involving Roma prisoners that made an impression on them for one reason or another. We learn, for instance, that Roma played in the camp orchestra and held positions as block supervisors, *Vorarbeiter* (work leaders), or *Unterkapos* (assistant *Kapos*):

*A Gypsy fiddler whose name I do not remember came from Wrocław.<sup>19</sup> He played the fiddle beautifully even though he could not read music at all. I remember him from the time of being in Auschwitz I and from the moment when he was brought to the camp. As a member of the Bekleidungskammer [“clothing chamber,” the labor detail that dealt with the civilian clothing in which prisoners arrived—Trans.] I was present when his transport was received. When he stripped naked, he wept and begged to be allowed to keep his fiddle. He didn’t want to part with it for the world. He gave an unusual demonstration of his abilities: stark naked, he played as if he were in a trance and coaxed sobbing tones out of the fiddle. That was enough to determine that he was immediately accepted in the camp orchestra. He was the best fiddler there despite not reading music. All he needed was for someone to play a passage from some work for him once and he repeated it flawlessly. This Gypsy was transferred from the main camp to Monowitz and played in the orchestra and even held the post of block supervisor for a certain time.<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., vol. IV, pp. 2399–2408.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., vol. III, pp. 1728–1755; vol. IV, pp. 2383–2407.

<sup>19</sup> The identity of this prisoner has been confirmed as Jakub Segar, deported to Auschwitz on May 8, 1942 and given number 34901.

<sup>20</sup> APMA-B. Statements, vol. 76, p. 22, account by P. Stolecki.

*A gypsy played the fiddle beautifully. At times a different Gypsy (a complete illiterate who held the post of Vorarbeiter) tap-danced.<sup>21</sup>*

*During the period when I worked in “Kanada” [the warehouse for property plundered from prisoners arriving in mass transports—Trans.] the men and women prisoners working there were almost exclusively Jewish. The only non-Jew was one of the unterkapos, a German Gypsy.<sup>22</sup>*

The accounts also contain information about the presence of Roma in the penal company in May 1942:

*There were several Gypsies in the penal company at the time. One of the Kapos had a special dislike of them. He called them “Negroes” and stamped them out like rats.<sup>23</sup>*

One former prisoner testified during the trial of commandant Rudolf Höss about the use of phenol injections to put Roma families to death in late 1942 or early 1943:

*With my own eyes I saw a whole Gypsy family made up of twelve people dead after injections to the heart. I personally took a note to the corpse carriers to come for the bodies of those Gypsies.<sup>24</sup>*

Former women prisoners, in turn, mention the presence of Roma women in the Birkenau camp:

*At the beginning of December (it was probably December 5 or 6, 1942) there was a general selection in the women’s camp.<sup>25</sup> SS-Obersturmführer Schwarz conducted this selection... We had to walk in front of him with our arms held out and he gave the sign to the left or to the right. As I recall, about eighteen thousand women went through selection, and there were also Gypsies among them.<sup>26</sup>*

*I remember in any case that the women prisoners built a bonfire outside the barracks, on which Czech Gypsy women... baked potatoes... The next morning, which was Sunday, December 6, 1942, we were again led to some sort of wooden barracks.<sup>27</sup>*

<sup>21</sup> APMA-B. Statements, vol. 88a, p. 156, account by M. Piłat.

<sup>22</sup> APMA-B. Statements, vol. 99, p. 27, account by Sz. Zajdów.

<sup>23</sup> APMA-B. Statements, vol. 132, p. 50, account by A. Kowalczyk.

<sup>24</sup> APMA-B. Höss Trial, vol. 17, p. 79, account by S. Markowski.

<sup>25</sup> Selection was held in the women’s camp in Birkenau on December 5, 1942; about two thousand women prisoners were taken to the gas chambers as a result. See: D. Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle 1939–1945*, New York, 1997, p. 279.

<sup>26</sup> APMA-B. Statements, vol. 7, p. 1048, account by D. Ostermann.

<sup>27</sup> APMA-B. Statements, vol. 99, p. 107, account by V. Kladivova.

*On December 12, 1942, we arrived at night at the train platform in Auschwitz. Here, after unloading us from the wagons, they divided us up according to sex and berded us to the camp in Birkenau. The women and girls were led to camp B1a... The block was marked no. 21... [and] in the block were both Jewish and Gypsy women.<sup>28</sup>*

In summary, we can state that Roma, both men and women, were deported to Auschwitz Concentration Camp from at least 1941. They came mainly from occupied Poland, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and the Third Reich. In the camp, they were given numbers from the general series. After the establishment of the so-called *Zigeunerlager* in Birkenau, some of them were transferred there. The overwhelming majority of them did not survive their time in the camp.

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<sup>28</sup> APMA-B. Statements, vol. 32, p. 19, account by S. Rojek.