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Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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FOR THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF NUREMBERG TRIALS, WAR CRIMES TRIAL RECORDINGS AVAILABLE ONLINE

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has made available online the full sound recordings of the War Crimes Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) established in Nuremberg, Germany, commonly referred to as the Nuremberg Trials.

Additionally, the film evidence presented by the World War II Allied prosecutors at the trial is now available for online viewing. The collection consists of 1,942 gramophone discs holding 775 hours of hearings and 37 reels of film used as evidence in the trials.

The sound content can be found on the Museum’s website here, and the film can be found here. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, Netherlands, is the custodian of the original IMT materials and has granted permission to the Museum to make them available online in time for the 75th anniversary of the start of the trials.

“The Nuremberg Trials mark the first time that an international court indicted defendants for perpetrating war crimes and crimes against humanity,” says Dr. Rebecca Boehling, Director of the National Institute for Holocaust Documentation, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “The 24 major Nazi officials indicted by the Allied victors--with American, British, French and Soviet judges presiding over the IMT-- represent only a tiny fraction of the perpetrators. Yet the Nuremberg trials documented in a court of law with international press coverage the historical truth of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes. The IMT Proceedings set lasting legal precedents that nations have a duty to protect civilians from atrocities and to punish those who commit them. Putting this important historical documentation online to view and to listen to is part of our ongoing efforts to digitize and make accessible the evidence of the Holocaust.”

The Museum, the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris, and the ICJ collaborated to digitize the recordings, a process which took two years and was the culmination of the ICJ’s broader project, initiated in the early 2000s, to digitize the entire IMT archives. More information on the IMT archives at the ICJ is available here.

“The Museum is deeply grateful to the International Court of Justice for permitting us to make this content available to the public,” continues Boehling. “In a time when Holocaust distortion and denial are on the rise, providing access to the evidence of these crimes is critically important.”

A living memorial to the Holocaust, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum inspires people to confront hate, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity. Its far-reaching educational programs and global impact are made possible by generous donors nationwide.
2. Soviet film on damage to Russian cultural heritage shown at Nuremberg Trials
   - Film Title: Разрушения культурного наследия на территории СССР
   - Date: 1946
   - Duration: 00:26:00
   - Special Collection: Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive

3. Soviet film on destruction in Russian cities shown at Nuremberg Trials
   - Film Title: Разрушение культурного наследия на территории Советского Союза
   - Date: 1946
   - Duration: 00:19:00
   - Special Collection: Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive
Over the last couple of months, one could observe a real flood of publications about Auschwitz on the book market. However, these are not scientific literature, but literary products which, given their form and subject matter, ought to be classified as historical novels.

The first of these novels had already achieved commercial success, which resulted in the almost immediate appearance of other similar novels. It led to a peculiar situation in which the once sinister and emotionally painful word "Auschwitz" became part of the social space (especially in the cities), was visible: in bookshop windows and news-stands, in shopping malls and petrol stations. Covers in grey-blue stripes soon became a fashionable prop which, together with a glass of iced coffee or a straw hat and beach blanket, created a pastel holiday photography composition shared on social media sites. The knowledge of the history of Auschwitz became a real must-have for anyone who declared themselves to be a literature lover in the virtual space. The popularity resulted in the fact that incidents (including fictional ones) described in such novels slowly began to permeate the discourse about the history of the camp, becoming a component of social conceptions about the reality of Auschwitz. It was first sighted by the guides and educators of memorial sites, who are often confronted with the need to verify and straighten out the information published in contemporary popular literature. The phenomenon became the inspiration for writing this text, the aim of which is not only to review contemporary novels but above all to assess the phenomenon of this peculiar "fashion for Auschwitz in literature" on the example of several selected works. These include The Tattooist of Auschwitz by Heather Morris (2018, published in Poland by Marginesy), Cilka's Journey by the same author (2020, Marginesy), Kommando Puff by Dominik W. Rettinger (2018, Świat Książki; the 2018 edition is titled: Eliza's Secret. Auschwitz. Paid Love), The Angel of Auschwitz by Eoin Dempsey (2019, Unique Edition), Black and Purple by Wojciech Dutka (2019, Albatros; I Edition: 2013), Auschwitz Lullaby by Mario Escobar (2019, published by Kobiece) and The Secret from Auschwitz by Nina Majewska-Brown (2019, published by Bellona).

A cursory reading of the novels mentioned above already makes it clear that what distinguishes them from the previously known camp writing is the lack of strict adherence to facts and the use of literary fiction as an essential tool for developing a narrative. The common denominator of almost all previous literary representations of Auschwitz was the realism and authenticity of the description. The subject matter was primarily dealt with by researchers and specialists who did not go beyond strict facts in their analysis. A slightly more subjective type of writing about Auschwitz was proposed by reporters, who generally made efforts to maintain professional and factual reliability. The most extensive group among those who made literary attempts to depict the realities of the concentration camp over the years following the war were the survivors themselves. Although the memoirs of former prisoners were sensitive to imperfections in perception, memory and interpretation, and a subjective representation
of Auschwitz in literature, the credibility of authors was supported by their personal experience.

Successive generations of readers became accustomed to treating publications with "Auschwitz" in their titles as credible sources of knowledge, and spontaneous trust of their authors.

Thus, the question arises as to whether writing fictional historical novels about Auschwitz is inappropriate? Certainly not. It simply depends on the assumption that the greater the time distance between us and those dramatic events and, consequently, the fewer people who have a direct, emotional connection to that place, the more often and braver it will be possible to use the experience of Auschwitz as an inspiration for literary work. The problem of the publications mentioned above does not lie in the very embedding of the action in the reality of the camp, but in the presentation of the reality in them, and the form given to these books. Their most characteristic feature and, yet the greatest transgression is the creation of a semblance of scientificity and a strong embedding in historical sources, while in fact, they are non-professional, popular books. Therefore, it can be said that these publications are part of the emerging trend of quasi-historical, or rather quasi-camp, literature.

The greatest evidence of the lack of professionalism of the publications discussed is the numerous factual errors contained in them. The authors often supplement the lack of knowledge about the functioning of the camp, its internal organisation and the lives of prisoners and SS men with their personal conjectures, simplifications or prevailing stereotypes, which for a careful reader are bound to create a sense of inconsistency or ambiguity of events. Clearly, one can distinguish several areas in which the literature under discussion has been falsified. All the books mentioned above present more or less the spatial organisation of the camp and its appearance. This fundamental issue, which is very easily perceptible given the fact that the grounds of the former Auschwitz and Birkenau camps have been preserved in their original state and the multitude of documents and photographs available at least on the Internet, has been completely neglected in the novels. The authors do not understand the essence of dividing the camp into individual parts and sections; they do not separate its various spaces in their books. The protagonists of their books move almost freely around the entire site; they enter various rooms and workshops, and even move alone between the Auschwitz I main camp and Birkenau situated almost 3 kilometres away from it, which in reality was impossible. In several instances, the authors incorrectly identify the blocks and their purpose. For example, the infamous block 11, whose basement and courtyard was the execution spot of thousands of political prisoners, is mistakenly numbered 10 in the two novels. It is incredibly awkward that the authors do not know the location of the buildings that are crucial to the plot: block 24 (which housed the camp brothel; it was not located on the right side of the courtyard behind the "Arbeit Macht Frei" gate. [Kommando Puff, p. 167], but on the left side of the camp street) or the Kindergarten (in the Roma camp), which occupied barracks 29 and
and 31 rather than 27 and 29 [Auschwitz Lullaby]. The author of the latter book was also mistaken in determining the number of blocks in the so-called Zigeunerlager (the Roma camp, at the BIIe section of Birkenau), even though the annexe to the book contained the correct camp plan with numbers of the barracks.

The second problem area, presented entirely at variance with reality, is the service of SS men in Auschwitz and their privileges. The camp officers enjoy complete impunity and considerably broader capabilities than in reality. Contrary to what the novel says, the crew members were not allowed to leave their place of duty at any time, or leave a prisoner unescorted outside the grounds of the camp or lead a prisoner out of the camp gate with a self-written pass (or even without a permit). Furthermore, it was not permitted to get drunk while on duty, and personal and sexual contact between SS personnel and inmates was particularly prohibited. These books build up an image of the service, during which bored, uncontrolled SS men walk around the camp in disarray, give vent to their animal instincts with sophisticated murders, constantly drinking and shooting at randomly passing prisoners, and raping female prisoners whenever and wherever they so desire. The military hierarchy with an extensive system of

superiority and discipline and obedience to superiors - these indispensable attributes of all uniformed formations, so crucial in managing such a large and organisationally complicated institution as the Auschwitz concentration camp - are not reflected in the quasi-camp books.

The authors also do not understand the formal rules of functioning of the camp, so ambiguities and improbable events appear in almost every scene where the course and explanation of events require knowledge of camp regulations. As an example: prisoners leave the camp without an escort, escape in absurd circumstances (e.g., just before the roll call, as in the Kommando puff, or "by chance," as in the Tattooist of Auschwitz), change the work command in unclear circumstances, and SS men visit sick female prisoners in the camp infirmary. Irregularities are also evident in the application of basic concepts. The authors do not distinguish between the nomenclature, role and scope of privileges and duties of functionary prisoners at different levels. Thus, the only representatives of prisoner power are the ubiquitous and all-powerful brutal kapos. The novels hardly ever mention the block leaders (responsible for maintaining order in the blocks), and there are no middle or lower-level functionaries at all: vorarbeiter, room leaders, night guards, guarding the entrance to the blocks, as well as functionary prisoners employed in the prison infirmary, and others. The complex social structure within the prisoner community is described in an overly simplified way, and its real internal diversity, which in practice translated into almost all aspects of the camp experience, is not reflected in the narrative. In terms of the characterisation of particular SS functionaries, the authors often confuse their ranks with those held in the camp and thus create non-existent posts, such as Obersturmführer of Canada (in the Angel of Auschwitz). Meanwhile, the Obersturmführer is the SS rank corresponding to that of lieutenant, and the correct name of the post is Kommandoführer Effektenlager (head of warehouses).

Multiple falsehoods appear in fragments describing the appearance of the gas chambers and the extermination process in Auschwitz.
It is safe to say that readers who build their awareness of the crimes committed there based solely on contemporary novels will not acquire any reliable knowledge that would allow them to understand what actually happened and how and why it happened in Auschwitz. The reader will instead create a false, stereotyped, and imbued with macabre yet unauthentic incidents, an entirely false image.

Falsifications are commonplace not only in descriptions of such complex phenomena, the correct grasp of which requires in-depth knowledge but also, something that is already difficult to justify, in terms of using known or easily verifiable dates. The author of the novel Black and Purple claims that the massacre in Babi Yar took place in the autumn of 1940, while in fact, it happened a year later; it wrongly states the date of the first transport of women to Auschwitz (which is particularly appalling as Helena Citronova, whose story was the basis for writing the book, arrived on this transport). It goes on to describe Maria Mandel's participation in the events of June 1942, when indeed she arrived at the camp four months later, in October 1942. It wrongly dates Konrad Morgen's visit to Auschwitz (it was 1943, not 1944).

Mario Escobar states that in June 1943, the conductor of the women's camp orchestra was Alma Rosé, who indeed was brought to Auschwitz in the second half of July 1943 and only after a few weeks did she join the orchestra. The main character of the book Angel of Auschwitz claims that in March 1945, during the evacuation from the Buchenwald Concentration Camp, female prisoners were taken to the gas chambers, which is clearly impossible.

Such errors in dates and other factual errors (such as claims that Dr Mengele conducted his medical experiments on prisoners in Dachau, that records of people murdered in gas chambers were made in Auschwitz, or information that propaganda films were made in Birkenau, in the family camp for Jews from the Theresienstadt Ghetto) are tingling in these novels. Incorrect information also appears in almost every passage in which the authors refer to the number of victims. Some of the books in question leave the nationality of the camp victims and their executioners unspecified (or intentionally undefined). Dempsey, while listing the categories of prisoners in his novel, omits the Poles, who were second only to Jews in terms of the number of prisoners and people murdered. Escobar states that the BIId section of Birkenau was a camp for Jews, men, while in fact, it was a camp for prisoners of all nationalities, a significant percentage of whom were Polish political prisoners. The omission of Poles (the first and until 1942 the most represented group) and other non-Jewish victims of the camp, which is a common feature of most of the novels in question, may lead to their gradual exclusion from memory about Auschwitz.

The lack of an exact name for the victims of the camp is accompanied by a parallel blurring of the category of perpetrators, who are generally referred to as "SS men" or "Nazis." The book, Angel of Auschwitz, contains a piece of history falsifying information stating that the cries of SS men in German and Polish could be heard on the ramp. For a reader with no historical knowledge, this sentence may suggest that the camp crew consisted of Poles, which is certainly not true; the SS men were solely of German nationality.

It is natural and actually difficult to criticise that the authors introduce fictional elements while writing their novels. Nevertheless, unless we are dealing with a fantasy novel, it is essential to preserve authenticity, which gives the reader the right to believe that the described events might happen in all probability. In general, the reader's experience and basic knowledge of the social world are sufficient tools to verify this authenticity. It is slightly different with regard to the reality of KL Auschwitz. The camp reality was so different from what we know of everyday life that separating what seems impossible yet real from what sounds likely but may not have occurred is extremely difficult when one only has common knowledge. Hence, such fragments which appear in the novels are a kind of litmus test of the author's knowledge and discernment. All the books discussed here
are full of such scenes (or very many), sometimes minor incidents, and sometimes crucial for the narrative of events, which in all probability could not have happened in Auschwitz as we know from documents, scientific studies and accounts of former prisoners. The various heroic deeds and "miraculous rescues" of the main characters are in general completely unreal, disconnected from the bureaucratic or social realities that governed Auschwitz. The manner in which the main character of the book Angel of Auschwitz rescues children brought to the extermination camp, the rescue of a would-be fugitive by the tattooist of Auschwitz, the miraculous survival of the protagonist in Kommando Puff - all this artificially inflates the bubble of heroism, which, however, bursts at the first attempt to verify their authenticity.

The camp's themes are closely related to macabre, drama and fear. However, unlike the camp diaries, which report on experiences of the prisoners, the elements of horror are deliberately exaggerated in the novels, and various scenes described were placed in the texts only to play on the reader's feelings, to arouse fear in them. To achieve this effect, the authors do not venture into literary processing of actual dramatic episodes, examples of which are provided in abundance by memoirs of former prisoners. They instead create their own macabre and horrific, shocking visions. The question of their authenticity, or rather the lack thereof, and the fact that they are indeed imaginary events that can never happen, is of no importance given their effectiveness in arousing and escalating emotions. Examples include, among others, the selection process involving Dr Mengele and the absurd scene of identifying a corpse in the gas chamber, presented in The Tattooist of Auschwitz. The description of the selection process conducted by Taube in the book Cilka's Journey is not only exaggerated and repulsive but also offensive to the memory of the victims, once again dehumanising them.

However, the greatest accusation one may have against authors of the quasi-camp literature is not that they make mistakes in their books; they fantasise that they create historical novels without a proper factual and technical base. All this would have no significance if the reader picking up a book of this type knew that they were dealing with literary fiction, with a product of the author's imagination, with an imaginary work that creates, not documents, a reality. However, the authors of quasi-camp novels consciously or not mislead the reader by giving their books the form of popular science publications and enclosing them with assurances about the authenticity of the described events. Assurances of credibility play a primary role on the covers of these novels. Thus, we are dealing here with "true stories" or novels "based on true stories". Inside the publication, the reader can find footnotes as well as maps, copies of documents and photographs, and sometimes acknowledgements to people associated with the research work (archives employees who carry out preliminary research). They also contain short biographies of people described in the novel, acknowledgements to them or members of their families. Lastly, they also contain information aimed at confirming the author's qualifications, as well as assurances about the diligent work invested in the preparation of the text - a list of publications and sources consulted, places visited and institutions contacted by the author. All this reinforces readers' misconception that they are dealing with a book containing something interesting about Auschwitz that will help them to learn about the camp fate of a particular individual.

However, if the authors take the trouble to get to know the history, why did their work (e.g. listening to the accounts of a witness, inquiring in the archives, sometimes getting acquainted with the subject literature) prove to be insufficient to create good, substantive texts? There are probably many reasons for this; however, two seem to be particularly prevalent. The first one is the lack of broadly understood professional training to work with memory materials, which results in excessive trust in the memory of the witness and lack of critical analysis of testimonies as sources. The mere hearing and even the most faithful writing of the history of a former prisoner is not still a guarantee for the creation of a text that is factually reliable. It is still necessary to at least verify it against other available sources and
studies. Archival documents also need to be read through and their content critically reviewed. However, in some cases, it is doubtful whether the authors have taken the trouble to read them at all - particularly where, for instance, data from maps and sketches contradict the text of the novel. Nina Majewska-Brown included in her book a copy of the instructions for writing a camp letter. The attached translation is incorrect at first glance (six points of the instruction from the copy of the document correspond to seven points in the translation). Not only did the author not translate the included document (she may have thoughtlessly inserted the very first translation found somewhere), but she also did not investigate the reason for this discrepancy.

The second reason why these books cannot be treated as reliable camp literature is the already mentioned deficiencies in the historical knowledge of their authors, which require a great deal of time and commitment to fill in. The issues of KL Auschwitz are as broad as its complex and multidimensional realities. In contrast to a story that may only refer to a small fragment of reality, the novel tackles all its contexts and dimensions: social, historical, institutional, bureaucratic, emotional, organisational. When creating a novel that aspires to be authentic, based on specific microhistory (which, for obvious reasons, is only available fragmentarily), the author must fill the gaps in the source narrative with imaginary elements; however, if they are to be credible, they must be based on extensive and in-depth knowledge of the subject. One cannot from the position of an expert extensively tell a story that one is not familiar with, and which is what the authors of contemporary novels attempt to do.

The question that came up earlier resurfaces here: is it possible to create literary fiction embedded in the reality of Auschwitz? The answer, of course, must be: yes. Art is governed by its laws, and as experience shows, the idea of freedom of artistic expression forgives a lot and can defend a lot. The author of what we call belles-lettres (as opposed to scientific literature and factual literature) is obviously not obliged to have such knowledge and professional competence necessary to create texts of paramount substantive significance. However, it is one thing to propose a fictional novel to the reader and another to convince him that this fiction has been documented and factually verified when indeed it is not.

So far, the deliberations have focused on the content, form and quality of the publications discussed here. In assessing the phenomenon of the growth of this peculiar "fashion for Auschwitz" in mass literature, it is also (and perhaps most importantly) worthwhile to take a critical look at the consequences of their impact on the mass audience and consider what the consequences of popularising this type of literature might be, especially in terms of memory and education about Auschwitz. KL Auschwitz is presented in these novels in an extremely simplified and falsified manner. Besides not explaining the various phenomena of the camp, these books consolidate erroneous clichés of thinking and replicate stereotypes about the realities of prisoners' lives. They unify phenomena that were, in fact, diverse. An example is the replication of the stereotype idea of arrival at the camp - mass transport in cattle wagons, their opening on
the ramp, separating men from women, selecting newcomers, taking children away from their mothers, then registering those admitted to the camp and sending those who have been declared unfit to work to the gas chambers. Meanwhile, the political prisoners sent to the camp were not subject to pre-selection. The selection of people unable to work was applied only to the Jews brought to Auschwitz on transports by the Reich Main Security Office. It was not a rule that chaos prevailed at the ramp during the reception and that SS men used blind, brutal violence against new arrivals. Indeed, such conduct often occurred during the arrival of transports carrying political prisoners, whom they tried to intimidate and force into submission from the very first moments. However, to the extent possible, more subtle manipulation techniques were used against the Jews brought to extermination, based primarily on an elaborate network of deception. The SS men wanted the arrival of the transport and transfer to the gas chambers to be as smooth as possible, rather than arousing panic and resistance in the crowd. To this end, they avoided taking children away from their mothers, rightly believing that this would trigger resistance and unnecessary confusion. Certainly, cases of violence may have occurred, but not as a rule and were not of the proportions described in the novels in question. This distinction is significant for education and understanding the events in Auschwitz.

Contemporary popular literature unifies the overall picture of the realities of prisoners' lives as if nothing changed in this respect over the years of existence of KL Auschwitz. However, both the appearance of the camp and its sanitary and social conditions, including the treatment of prisoners, changed. The lease of prisoners as a labour force to industrial plants forced them to take measures to ensure their capability to work. For this reason, for example, over time, arbitrary acts of violence against inmates were restricted, and they were permitted to receive food parcels that improved the food supply situation for at least some of them. Conversely, going to work outside the camp and the prisoners' contact with civilian workers forced the sanitary situation to improve so as to prevent the epidemic of infectious diseases from spreading outside the camp.

Another example of change is the fact that since mid-1943, non-Jewish prisoners were no longer subject to regular selections, especially in hospital blocks, during which emaciated and sick prisoners were sentenced to death. At about the same time, they also stopped killing non-Jewish children born in the camp. About the middle of 1942, they stopped using
routine decimations as part of collective responsibility for the escape of a prisoner. Over time, the conditions of the prisoners' accommodation improved slightly, for example, in the main camp the prisoners initially slept on a straw-lined floor, later on, pallets, and finally on three-story bunks. In contemporary popular literature, these changes are not reflected and often describe phenomena inadequate to the time of the event (e.g. cesspits in Birkenau in the second half of 1943, the drowning of new-borns in buckets in 1944, etc.). It creates a false image of the camp as a place of static reality, which - contrary to logic - did not undergo any modifications regardless of changes in the war situation.

The phenomenon of the sexualisation of the subject matter of the camp is new and perhaps surprising. All of the novels mentioned above have threads referring directly to sexuality, nearly always presented in a brutalised and purely carnal context. Both the blunt erotic scenes and the more subtle interjections, which are somewhat on the margins of the main thread, give the reader the utterly wrong idea that sexuality plays a significant role in the camp and that satisfying erotic need is one of the main concerns of the people imprisoned in the camp. Meanwhile, both survivors' accounts and medical as well as social science investigations unequivocally prove that as a result of hunger, exhaustion from work and cachexia, and as a consequence of living under chronic stress and constant threat to life, the issues of sexuality and eroticism waned beyond the perception of most prisoners. As the prisoners were starving, and exhausted by murderous daily work, their sexual drive faded away, and most of them felt virtually no erotic need.

In this trend, the rapes of female prisoners by SS crew members are a common theme. The novels create the false idea that such acts are not only common but also permitted. In reality, however, all forms of such contact were strictly forbidden and condemned by the SS authorities. It was impossible to maintain long-term sexual relations between a female prisoner and an SS man. There are known cases in the history of Auschwitz in which SS-men accused of a crime of racial dishonour were punished (the most famous example is Gerhard Palitzsch).

This sexual discourse about Auschwitz is based on the shifting of emphasis - a marginal phenomenon draws the attention of the recipient, creating an illusion of its universality. It is easy to convince the reader that the issues discussed so far are deliberately concealed or marginalised by researchers. The sexual discourse seems to be a procedure designed to create an effect. It is supposed to attract the readers, make them believe that they have peeked under the surface of camp life and become custodians of some sensational secrets previously protected. Such a narration certainly makes sexual issues more attractive to the mass audience, unfamiliar with the history of the camp. The emphasis on eroticism does not so much falsify history as it creates an alternative version, inconsistent with reality.

A dangerous phenomenon that can be seen in popular literature seems to be the creation of an unreal image of the SS crew members. Here one can observe a certain two-way approach. On the one hand, the demonisation of SS men is clearly visible, consisting in presenting them as a bunch of depraved, bloodthirsty, degenerate beasts, devoid of emotion and incapable of feeling remorse. The main occupation of the SS crew members is the brutal rape of female prisoners and the unprecedented murder of prisoners in the camp. Among the SS men, whose main attributes are violence, cynicism, and aggression, it is impossible to distinguish ordinary people with a normal life outside Auschwitz, where they function as normal as possible under the conditions of war - they have wives, children, and ageing parents, write letters home, plan their future, have fun, and show sympathy or aversion to their companions.

Though one cannot deny that the SS men in the camp abused their power by stealing, bullying and killing - yet reducing such behaviour to personal predispositions and explaining it exclusively through the prism of internal sadistic and psychopathic tendencies sets back the discussion about the human ability to do evil by decades, simplifies it enormously, and in
in fact puts an end to the possibility of understanding how so many people agreed to participate in the genocide committed at Auschwitz.

In addition to this one-dimensional, comprehensive picture of the SS crew, the figure of a good SS man appears. It is perhaps a crystal unit from beginning to end, which entered the service in Auschwitz against its own will (as in the books Angel of Auschwitz and The Secret of Auschwitz), or one which, under the influence of love, undergoes a kind of metamorphosis (e.g. Black and Purple), or struggles with its conscience (as in Kommando puff, and partly also in Auschwitz Lullaby). The interest and emotions of the reader are focused on this character, its (moral) suffering, actions, thoughts and decisions. It may lead to a paradoxical situation (which is most clearly shown in the book Angel of Auschwitz), in which the SS-man becomes the beneficiary of attention, care and compassion. The reader starts to cheer on and empathise with the SS man. The victims of the camp assume a secondary role, and their fate seems to be of secondary importance to the moral transformation or struggle of the hero in the SS uniform. It is not only a far-reaching relativisation of the concept of guilt and perpetration with respect to Auschwitz. It is, above all, an insult to the victims of the camp and their memory.

A noticeable phenomenon is the already mentioned gruesomeness of the camp problems, consisting in exaggerating the crimes perpetrated by overstating the number of victims, exaggerating and over-emphasising dramatic individual phenomena as if they were the norm, as well as describing untrue nightmares invented by the author. At the same time, the authors completely ignore the day-to-day problems that make up the daily inhuman experience of the prisoners that lead them to a state of extreme physical and mental exhaustion and, consequently, to slow death. The prisoners portrayed in the novels do not seem to feel permanent hunger, and if they are at all ill, usually suffer from typhus, but not from persistent scabies, avitaminosis, scurvy, boils, diarrhoea. They also do not suffer from ordinary colds, which under the camp conditions turned into life-threatening pneumonia and could end up in death. The loss of freedom, detachment from the family, uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones and longing for home, as well as camp filth, vermin and the omnipresent brutalisation of life are not sources of suffering to them either. These novels lack balance in presenting the torture to which prisoners were subjected; it is difficult to discern in them the daily life of the camp. The authors instead highlight that which is incidental or marginal, convincing the reader that this was everyday life.

Such balancing on the brink of crime drama can have serious negative consequences for the recipient's perception. The point is not only that such an image of Auschwitz is simply not authentic. First and foremost, the dazzling horror makes the reader get used to dealing with extreme macabre, and thus their sensitivity to the fate of the victims is reduced. The contrast between what is contained in the novels and what actually happened may lead to a diminution of the list of genuinely committed crimes and the conclusion that Auschwitz was not as terrible as it could have been. Does poisoning people alive with gas not give the impression of an almost humane act? Does death by shooting appear not to be a mild form of death in the face of the alternative of dogs tearing people apart? Similarly, overstating the number of victims may lead to the belief that there were "few of them" in reality. After all, according to documentation, between September and October 1943, "only" 11,000 Jews were sent directly from the ramp to the gas chambers, not 60,000, as Dempsey states in The Angel of Auschwitz. The desensitisation here is to lead the reader to the conclusion that the historical reality was less terrible than they expected and not as cruel as it could have been.

The last element specific to contemporary popular novels is a kind of trivialisation and turning the problems of Auschwitz into soap-opera. The dramatic history of the camp and the unprecedented crime that took place there becomes only a background for love stories (described in such an idealised way that they seem tacky). The narrative is conducted in such a way as to focus the reader's attention only on
the main characters - usually a female prisoner and a male (prisoner or SS-man). The plot of the story is the emotions that appear between them, love, or a dangerous game, lined with fascination and eroticism, in which a woman's life is at stake. The annihilation going on behind their backs, if at all outlined in a way that is noticeable to the reader, only serves as a background. The mass crime that occurs in the background is of no importance as long as it does not become a real threat to the main characters. All that matters is their fate and survival. The subconscious desire for a happy ending that accompanies the reader, which novels constructed in such a way generally aim to achieve, is obscured by the fact that in the face of the Holocaust and the more than one million victims of Auschwitz, there is and cannot be a happy ending.

It seems that the sudden spill of books with "Auschwitz" in their title (or plot) - alleged biographies and novels supposedly based on facts - which is noticeable not only on the Polish publishing market, is a response to the growing interest in this issue in relation to the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the end of the war. It can be assumed that contemporary authors, inspired by this particular "fashion" for Auschwitz, decided to fill the gap that arose with the passing away of witnesses to history and the lack of new memoirs of their authorship.

The analysis of selected novels created in this trend leads to several observations. First of all, contrary to what the authors try to prove in most examples, these books should be treated only as literary fiction. The multitude of factual errors they contain, simplified interpretations and explanations, as well as factual unreliability make them of little cognitive value.

Secondly, the trend has already become visible in literature in other fields of art, namely the pop-culture of Auschwitz. Its characteristic features are the previously mentioned: sexuality, relativisation, gruesomeness, isaurisation and banalisation of the history of Auschwitz. In terms of content, pop-culturalisation manifests itself in the adaptation of a narrative to the expectations of the recipients, trivialisation of the depicted world, translation of the camp reality and actions of the protagonists based on a black-and-white scheme, as well as the simplification of even the most complex phenomena, use of simplified, and therefore inadequate and erroneous explanations. The mediocrity (or even simplicity) at the linguistic and literary level is accompanied by a noticeable lack of consistency and logic of disquisition in some places, as well as editorial negligence and factual unreliability.

The story, set in the reality of a concentration camp, is supposed to engross, move and shock the reader. The symbol of Auschwitz is used instrumentally in this trend as a way to arouse the reader's interest. Some of the authors declare that their aim is to present some element of the history of the camp and commemorate it. Meanwhile, the content of these books, which testifies to little understanding and only fragmentary knowledge, indicates that the facts and preservation of authenticity are of secondary, if not marginal relevance. This literature trivialises and distorts history, and additionally dehumanises and offends the victims, using their suffering exclusively as a set design for kitschy love stories.
Accordingly, it seems appropriate to describe this literature as quasi-camp and to speak of a new trend that may be temporarily popular. Is it worthwhile, then, to reach for publications of this trend? There is no clear answer to this question. It is impossible to get acquainted with all books about the camp that have appeared in the last two years. Of course, classifying all of them as pseudo-camp books and collectively discrediting them based on analysis of only a few is inadmissible and unfair to the authors of those that may have been developed with greater credibility. Nonetheless, for an inexperienced reader, looking for a valuable and authentic title on the subject of Auschwitz amidst the clump of contemporary editions is like looking for an exit in the dark in unknown territory. Choosing the right one is only a matter of luck. All the more so because the titles labelled as best-sellers (sometimes even before their premiere), widely applauded and recommended in social media as deserving readers' attention, sometimes turn out to be pieces of trash for which the success is not attributable to literary or factual value, but to a carefully planned promotional campaign.

So, how does one separate the grain from the chaff and recognise quasi-camp literature? Sometimes it suffices to look at the name of the author, see what competencies they have to deal with a given topic and what literary legacy they possess to date. Most importantly, however, it is advisable to explore classic memoir publications written by survivors. It is worthwhile to look at the accounts and
memoirs that were written in the first two or three decades after the war when the memory of the witnesses was still relatively fresh. These texts have not lost their relevance. These texts more faithfully reproduce everyday life in the camp and help to build a closer picture of what it was like in the camp. With such knowledge, the attentive reader is undoubtedly able to perform an initial critical analysis of today’s popular publications on the subject of Auschwitz and indicate which of them were written in the privacy of the study, detached from the experience of the prisoners and not even preceded by the author’s visit to the former camp. In most cases, a basic understanding of the history of the camp allows one to judge if one is actually dealing with literature that may aspire to be called historical, or with a quasi-camp literary fiction presenting only some form of authorial impressions about Auschwitz, which is devoid of any substantive value, detrimental to the memory education.
The exhibition is entitled “SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor. German extermination camp 1942-1943” and is presented in a modern museum pavilion, forming part of new interior arrangement of the Sobibór memorial site. Design of the building and its surroundings, referring to land development principles dating back to 1965, was created by: Piotr Michalewicz, Łukasz Mieszkowski, Mateusz Tański and Marcin Urbanek – winners of the international competition for the architectural and artistic concept of the site. Following the vision of the designers, location of the museum building is supposed to direct the attention of visitors onto two places representing particular significance for the history of the camp: the railway ramp, where trains transporting the deportees used to stop, and former prisoners’ camp where the uprising broke out. As emphasized by Tomasz Kranz, Ph.D., exhibition curator and director of the Museum, “design prepared by the architects is supposed to mark in a symbolical way the border between death and freedom won in the fight by some of the prisoners”. Authors of the exposition followed the idea of reading the post-camp image and discovering its traces and meanings as well.

The exhibition presents and brings closer the reality of the functioning of German extermination camp in Sobibór as part of an extensive plan of extermination of Jewish population in Europe occupied by the Third Reich. Sixteen theme-related panels discuss key issues of history of the Shoah – from the assumptions of Nazi racial policy and plans of extermination of the Jews, nicknamed “Einsatz Reinhardt”, through displacement and mass murders, to detailed instructions on the functioning of the camp and the uprising organized on October 14th 1943, being one of the most heroic acts of Jewish resistance during the Second World War.

The aim of the exhibition, resulting from the Museum’s missions, consists in telling current and future generations about the Shoah as well as in commemorating and restoring the subjectivity of thousands – mostly anonymous – victims with the help of specific archaeology of memory. It was achieved by presenting the accounts of former prisoners, quoting the names of victims, places of their origin and presenting photographs of some of them. Nearly a hundred photos and documents reconstruct camp topography, present how the buildings located within its premises looked like, record the nightmare of deportation and transport of Jewish families, present the faces of crime perpetrators and their victims.

The collection of memories, gathered in a meticulous way, is complemented by the objects discovered at the site of the crime during archaeological works. As a result of many years of research, thousands of discoveries were made, including among others fragments of buildings with the foundations of gas chambers. However, the most extensive collection of artifacts consists of items brought to the camp by the deportees and these personal belongings carry the greatest emotional, historical and symbolical value.
MUZEUM

Budowę otwartego w 2020 r. Muzeum i Miejsca Pamięci na terenie byłego niemieckiego naziistowskiego obcego zagłady w Sobiborze poprzedziły grunty badania archeologiczne. Umożliwili one dyskrytyzowanie i właściwe zabezpieczenie masowych mogił w obrębie dawnego sektora zagłady (Lager III) oraz odkrycie wielu ważnych pozostałości i śladów infrastruktury obecnej.

Podczas prac wykopaliskowych znaleziono tysiące obiektów, głównie przedmiotów osobistych pomordowanych, których część ekspozowana jest na wystawie stałej. Wyobraź sobie, że od ziemi po kilka dziesięciu lat zostały namazane dowodem świadectwem Holokaustu, a nad nimi wszystko materialnymi i symbolicznymi nasilającymi pamięć o żyjących w Polsce mężczyznach, kobietach i dzieciach zamordowanych w Sobiborze w latach 1942–1943.

Dzięki temu relikto, przede wszystkim heroizmu, powstałemu Muzeum i Miejsce Pamięci w Sobiborze wypowiedziane przez Aleksandra Pisczareckiego: „Niech dawą się dowiedzieć, co się tu działo”.
Georges Didi-Huberman, in his book Images In Spite of All, referred to several photographs performed in secret by prisoners with a photo camera smuggled to the camp: “Let us not refer [...] to the unimaginable. It was so much harder for prisoners to steal from the camps the tiny fragments that we store now, hardly bearing their load with one look. These tiny fragments are for us more precious and less comforting than any possible work of art, as they were thus torn from the world that had wanted to discontinue their existence”. This thought can be referred to all items which survived and bear dramatic witness of the crime and the authors assigned particular significance to them.

Central part of the exposition is constituted by a 25-meter displace case. Behind the glass, in its milk-white interior that resembles a laboratory, over 700 items were collected. They are among others the accessories that used to belong to the victims: jewellery, keys, glasses, clothes fragments, stationery. Some of them – for example an enamelled plate with the mark including Sara Mock-Hakker’s personal details or a triangular label with a name and best wishes written on it – can be assigned to specific persons, but the majority form the archive of anonymous proofs of death.

The items were arranged in sequences according to their meaning. They correspond to the stages of passing through the camp – from the arrival until death – and present the fate of their owners in a symbolical way, forming parallel narration, making it possible for the visitor to face the dualism of the Shoah: its unimaginable mass scale and individual experience of death. Their combination is overwhelming – they are like tombstones on a nearby clearing representing the multitude of victims. But they can all be studied individually as well – a meaningful detail motivates the imagination to work and in this little fragment, it makes us feel the depth of individual tragedy. Such direct, even personal contact is made possible in particular through the artifacts placed in separate small cabinets inserted in walls – a watch with its hands that stopped, child’s toy, a ring. As written by Tomasz Kranz, “by being the proofs of death, they remind us of life”. This human dimension of the exhibition seems the most important.

Another important aspect of the exhibition consists in the reconstruction, as faithful as possible, of historical camp space. The model, constructed as a result of the laborious work of historians and archaeologists, reconstructs the topography of the site and ensures the feeling of tangible contact with the past. It was developed not only basing on excavations and historical photographs, but also on the plans sketched by survivors and SS officers questioned during investigations.

The architecture and scenography of the exhibition refer in some points to the historical arrangement of the camp – the structure resembling a railway ramp or room with its walls panelled with charred wood creates the atmosphere, emphasize the content and message. It is worth to mention here the authentic artifacts: barrack walls or tree trunks with ingrown barbed wire – living symbols of the tragic past.
with ingrown barbed wire – living symbols of the tragic past.

The exposition displayed in Sobibór constitutes a perfect example of the modern way of thinking about the exhibitions. Minimalistic space promotes concentration and gathers artifacts, information boards and multimedia displays that make it possible for visitors to interact with documentaries and carry out their own search through an extensive repository. They build complex museum narrative, combining the facts enabling us to understand the past and the artifacts which bring closer the fate of its main characters, and thanks to unique presentation and interior arrangement, can be remembered deeply. The language of this narrative is open: it does not impose any preconceived interpretation on the visitor, but creates the opportunity to understand and experience it in their own way. On one hand, it constitutes a thorough and multi-threaded comment to displayed objects, while on the other, it explains in a simple and clear way the issues of utmost importance connected with the Shoah. In this way, the visitor receives a complete exhibition, in which things and words combine to form a palimpsest of meanings open to individual sensitivity and empathy.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue, constituting a comprehensive complementation of displayed objects, which makes it possible for all those interested in the subject to extend their knowledge on the extermination camp in Sobibór. Its subsequent chapters develop sixteen theme-related panels around which the exhibition has been constructed. The catalogue presents vast iconography of the camp: the reproductions of historical photographs and documents, maps and photos of the most interesting artifacts and views. The catalogue and the exposition complement one another and in this way, readers can study on their own what they have already seen at the Museum.

Key task of the new museum in Sobibór consists in preserving the memory and broadening the knowledge about the extermination of European Jews by the Third Reich regime. Documenting and commemorating the victims of the “Reinhardt” action carried out in the years 1942-1943 within the General Governorate for the Occupied Polish Region is of particular importance for the site. Various methods of representing past events applied with this idea in mind by the authors of the exhibition and the Museum, combined with the care for preserving historical background and authenticity, may contribute to gradual broadening of the consciousness and horizons of European memory of the Holocaust.
“AUSCHWITZ. NOT LONG AGO. NOT FAR AWAY” EXHIBITION WITH THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE AWARD / EUROPA NOSTRA AWARD

The exhibition „Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away” prepared jointly by the Spanish company Musealia and the Auschwitz Memorial has received the Grand Prix of the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award. It is the most prestigious European award in the heritage field. The project was second in Public Choice Award. The awards were presented in a special online ceremony on 10 November 2020.

The exhibition traces the development of Nazi ideology and tells the transformation of an ordinary Polish town of Oświęcim where during the occupation the German Nazis created the largest concentration camp and extermination center—at which ca. 1 million Jews, and tens of thousands of others, were murdered. Victims included Polish political prisoners, Sinti and Roma, Soviet POWs, and other groups persecuted by Nazi ideology, such as: disabled, asocials, Jehovah’s Witnesses or homosexuals. In addition, the exhibition contains artifacts that depict the world of the perpetrators—SS men who created and operated the largest of the German Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

“The award is an important signal. The exhibition has been very well received by the visitors as well as by schools and the media. It is a very good, modern, extensive exhibition about the history of the camp and its victims. But today, for me, it is extremely important that the history of dehumanization of the victims touches the very heart of our postwar identity,” said Auschwitz Museum director Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński.

“Regardless of the development of the epidemic situation in the world, every step in creating a safer, more friendly world that respects human rights is a step against all ideologies of hatred, racism, antisemitism or xenophobia,” he emphasized.

Luis Ferreiro, the director of Musealia said, that it is not possible to understand the space of freedom, democracy and security that we share today as Europeans without facing this story. “Europe is built on the moral ruins of Auschwitz. It happened in the heart of Europe and just a generation ago,” he stated.

“This recognition encourages us to keep working in preserving this vital heritage of memory, reaching out with its message to citizens all over the world,” he added.

According to the jury this awareness-raising and educational project preserves the memory of one of the worst episodes in the history of humanity and is based on deep, scientific, historical research. „The topic is communicated in a direct and accessible way for different audiences without lessening its importance and has already reached an impressive number of visitors. The exhibition is supported by social media dissemination of the contents in order to approach a young audience and to maintain the remembrance of the victims of Auschwitz,” stated the jury.
Luis Ferreiro, director of Musealia, the company which created the exhibition in partnership with the Auschwitz Museum
“A strong network of institutions was engaged in the project and it is an example of good practice for partnerships between non-profit and for-profit organisations. The exhibition opens up the platform for increasing the knowledge, collection and interpretation of the documentation. Its display succeeded in recreating the emotional experience of visiting the real site, which is challenging for a travelling exhibition and is thanks in part to the richness of the content,” the Jury continued.

The first presentation of the exhibition took place in Madrid where it was visited by over 600 thousand people. Now it is displayed in the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. Featuring more than 700 original objects, the New York presentation of the exhibition allow visitors to experience artifacts from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum including hundreds of personal items—such as suitcases, eyeglasses, and shoes—that belonged to survivors and victims of Auschwitz. Other artifacts include concrete posts that were part of the fence of the Auschwitz camp; fragments of an original barrack for prisoners from the Auschwitz III-Monowitz camp; a desk and other possessions of the first and the longest serving Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss; a gas mask used by the SS; Pablo Picasso’s Lithograph of Prisoner; and an original German-made Model 2 freight wagon used for the deportation of Jews to the ghettos and extermination camps in occupied Poland.

The European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards were
launched by the European Commission in 2002 and have been run by Europa Nostra ever since. This year, Europe’s top honor in the heritage field went to 21 exemplary achievements from 15 European countries. Musealia and the Auschwitz Memorial received the award in “Education, Training and Awareness-rising” category. Three projects selected by the jurors from all award recipients were honored with the Grand Prix.

The awards celebrate and promote best practices related to heritage conservation, research, management, volunteering, education and communication. In this way, they contribute to a stronger public recognition of cultural heritage as a strategic resource for Europe’s society, economy and environment. The Awards are funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

More information:

New international travelling exhibition on the history of Auschwitz opened in Madrid

A huge success of the Auschwitz exhibition in Madrid

Our responsibility today is the same as it was ‘not so long ago and not so far away. "Auschwitz" exhibition opened in New York.

Over 100,000 visitors of the exhibition about Auschwitz in New York. The exhibit extended until August 2020.
Clear mission

Since EHRI’s beginning, we have followed a clear mission: to enable new transnational research on the Holocaust by overcoming dispersal and fragmentation of Holocaust archives and expertise across the globe. We have approached this mission by integrating the holdings and expertise of archives and research centres and by offering virtual and physical access through fellowships, online services and training programmes.

First and foremost, EHRI enables scholarly research on the Holocaust, but it also serves a wider social, cultural and political purpose. The Holocaust is a formative European experience, and an intrinsic part of our shared history and cultural heritage. Holocaust documentation, research and commemoration therefore have relevance far beyond the walls of academia. Central to EHRI’s mission is a recognition that the darkest chapter in European history must be reread and refined by each passing generation, so that it may serve as a warning and as a negative foil against which we can define ourselves.

Continued relevance

Our mission and wider impact are as relevant today as they were ten years ago. Safeguarding, integrating and enhancing access to Holocaust archives remain key challenges. This has been powerfully articulated in the 2020 Ministerial Declaration of the International Holocaust Research Alliance (IHRA). Issued on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration and extermination camps earlier this year, the declaration reaffirms the commitment of the member states to safeguarding the historical record of the Holocaust and other victims of Nazi Germany, and it underlines the ongoing importance of “identifying, preserving, and making available archival material, testimonies and authentic sites for educational purposes, commemoration and research.” EHRI is fully committed to this mission. In our view the troubling recent rise of xenophobia, racism, Antisemitism and narrow nationalisms demonstrate that understanding the mechanics and legacy of the Holocaust is never a purely academic concern, but a prerequisite for the further development of stable, open and non-discriminatory societies across Europe and beyond.

Great strides

EHRI has made great strides to approach its mission over the last decade. We have developed the EHRI Portal that gives information about dispersed Holocaust sources, as well as the Conny Kristel Fellowship Programme, the Document Blog, EHRI Editions, and an extensive training programme including an online course and seminars. We have developed a committed and growing community around our services, and EHRI is now an important landmark in the Holocaust archive and research landscape. However, we are not resting on our laurels. In September this year we have launched the ambitious EHRI-3 project which will further
expand our existing services, develop new online and in-person activities, and establish connections to new communities and networks.

Permanent European Research Infrastructure for Holocaust research

EHRI’s success has been widely recognised, most prominently in 2018, when the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructure (ESFRI) placed EHRI on its Roadmap. The ESFRI Roadmap identifies research infrastructure initiatives that have high strategic importance for the future development of the European Research Area. Our placement on the ESFRI Roadmap enables us to transform EHRI from a series of projects into a permanent organisation in the context of the EHRI Preparatory Phase project which started last year. Although effecting such a transformation is challenging, we are confident that we can launch EHRI as a permanent European Research Infrastructure for Holocaust research in January 2025, the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Collective and pan-European effort

EHRI is a consortium of 25 partner institutions from across Europe, Israel and the United States. Its success is due to the effort and dedication of the staff working at our partners. As a truly collective and pan-European effort, EHRI shows what can be achieved when institutions and people pool expertise, perspectives and resources across geographical and disciplinary boundaries. Bringing together and supporting collaboration between so many Holocaust-related and digital humanities organisations has often been considered one of EHRI’s greatest achievements.
A large European Jewish population perished during the Holocaust. Many of those who survived left postwar Europe. The small communities who still live here today are the messengers of a vanished world in a dynamic process of rediscovering. Not only the new generations of Jews from abroad look for their religious and cultural origins when visiting the lands of their ancestors, but also gentiles – non-Jewish individuals interested in historical and cultural discoveries, youngsters or curious tourists – explore on various occasions the European Jewish past. It is about a captivating journey facilitated by local Jewish communities, historians, public institutions or private tour operators who create spaces of memory and sites of cultural material and immaterial heritage eager to be (re)discovered.

The motif of “rediscover” inspired the developing of a complex project with 18 partners from 8 countries with mid-sized cities connected to the Danube River (Szeged/Hungary, Galați & Timișoara/Romania, Murska Sobota/Slovenia, Osijek/Croatia, Regensburg/Germany, Subotica/Serbia, Kotor/Montenegro, Banja Luka/Bosnia and Herzegovina). The project aims to create products and local tourism services that will revive and present hidden and less-known available Jewish cultural heritages.

“Rediscover, expose and exploit the concealed Jewish heritage of the Danube Region” (2018-2021) is a project financed by the European Regional Development Fund within the Danube Transnational Programme under the specific objective of fostering sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources.

Municipality of Szeged as Lead Partner coordinates the partnership between cities in creating inspiring synergies that will boost the regional and local development through Jewish cultural tourism. Main areas that will frame the local resources of Jewish heritage correspond to gastronomy, built heritage, events and oral history. The project builds thus on other initiatives (i.e. Jewish Heritage Europe or AEPJ Jewish Heritage) deployed in larger cities and areas, who had offered their input for Rediscover team.

One of the main partners in REDISCOVER project is the Municipality of Galați (Romania) supported by the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities (RIRNM) (Cluj) as associated strategic partner.

A port city at the Danube, Galați enjoys a rich historical past of multiculturalism. The first compact Jewish communities began to develop here in the 17th century, experiencing a rich
religious life and traditional institutional organizations with synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, Israeli hospitals and primary schools, craft guilds, charity societies, ritual baths, Hevra Kadishah etc. Galați was also a renowned Zionist center, hosting until 1919 the Central Committee of the Federation of Zionists in Romania.

During the First World War, Galați was close to the front line and suffered heavy losses. Many Jews from the city enrolled in the Romanian army and died for their country. The interwar period marked a vibrant chapter in the history of the community. In the 1930s, in the harbor-city lived over 19,000 Jews (almost 20% of the city’s population), representing one of the largest communities in Moldavia.

Being active in all socio-professional branches, some prominent members of the community held functions in the local administration. The tragic events of World War II marked the fate of the city and its Jews. Anti-Semitic policies have affected the Danube Jewish communities, facing numerous restrictions, the plundering of goods, pogroms, deprivation of citizens’ rights, internment in camps, compulsory labor etc.

Soon after the establishment of the post-war political regime, the Jewish life in Galați began to recover. Some have tried to adapt to the new power, but most of the Jewish population has migrated to Palestine or other destinations. The number of Jews in Galați decreased dramatically: at the beginning of the 1990s, there were still 180 Jews in the city, while the last census (2011) recorded only 100 people.
through its projected products and services, REDISCOVER highlights the remarkable legacy of the Jewish community, reflecting the invaluable contribution of the Jews for placing Galați on the cultural and touristic map of Romania. COVID-19 pandemic amplified the challenges these initiatives have to bear, since tourism is one of the most affected sectors due to the state’s restrictions.

However, the Municipality of Galați, joined by external experts, historians of the RIRNM and other stakeholders readjusted its planned activities by preparing an e-Festival that will mirror the Jewish community life and history on the Danube’s shore. This virtual event will bring to the fore all the valuable potential tourism products identified so far. The festival will be hosted on a bilingual website (RO/EN) expected to be released in January 2021.

It will include virtual guided tours and maps, a short e-cookbook with local Jewish recipes, an exhibition of old photos and traditional objects as traces of the former life of the local Jewish community. The website will also integrate oral history samples with recorded interviews with the members of the community, as well as recorded and uploaded artistic performances. Similar initiatives of the partner cities which highlight the local Jewish past will be deployed and connected as a tribute to a rich cultural heritage and a label of REDISCOVER. More information will follow soon.

Info about the project achievements at http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/rediscover

Facebook page

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