

The Sonderkommandos

Sonderkommando: noun (German, *Sonder*, special and *Kommando*, unit). Unit of prisoners (mostly Jews) who were forced by the Nazis to participate in the eradication process, without necessarily perform themselves the murdering part.

Now that the crimes, committed by the Wehrmacht, have been recognized for some part thanks to the large traveling exhibition dedicated to these facts between 1995 and the early years 2000, now that the visibility of the extermination in the East has reached unprecedented peaks thanks to the research on the "Holocaust by bullets", now that Auschwitz has been visited over 1.3 million times last year, the historical and memorial recognition of the Sonderkommando and Arbeitsjuden (the closest witnesses of the "Holocaust by gas") is still more difficult to achieve. Are the gassings only posted as background information? Are the (mandatory) actors of the most advanced mass murder in modern history still *personae non gratae* of history and memory?

The Sonderkommando of Auschwitz were the obligatory actors and direct witnesses of the gasification of the European Jews, Roma and Sinti, the deportees labeled as useless and of many Soviet soldiers. They were in the center of the Nazi extermination process, that had reached its highest level of technicality. However, their stories, written testimonies during the eradication itself or later recounted testimonies of survivors, despite the recent publications, recognized no real place in the memory of the genocide of the Jews. They were for a long time banned from the Jewish memory and depicted as devils by the deportees themselves. Following Primo Levi, some historians or philosophers classified them in the gray area, often reinterpreted in a negative way. The presence of the Arbeitsjuden in the other eradication centers became even more neglected.

This symposium aims is twofold. First, make a balance of the Sonderkommando and Arbeitsjuden on an historical and memorial level. Then, discuss the memory of the Sonderkommando in the broadest sense, their appearance in the testimony of the surviving deportees, in literature, theater and film.

The forced labourers of death.
Sonderkommandos and Arbeitsjuden

23 - 24 - 25 May 2013

Informations & inscriptions

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International Symposium

ORGANISED BY PHILIPPE MESNARD AND FRÉDÉRIC CRAHAY

The forced labourers of death Sonderkommandos and Arbeitsjuden

23 - 24 - 25 May 2013

At the International Press Center
& the Royal Library of Brussels

Brussels



www.auschwitz.be

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Auschwitz Foundation
Remembrance of Auschwitz

The forced labourers of death. Sonderkommandos and Arbeitsjuden

Thursday, the 23rd of May 2013 IPC - Residence Palace

09h20 Opening speech: Mrs. Joëlle Milquet, federal Minister for Equal Opportunities and Minister of the interior

09h30 Introduction to the Symposium: Philippe Mesnard, Memory of Auschwitz/Auschwitz Foundation, UBP Clermont-Ferrand/ CELIS EA 1002

PLACING THE CONTEXT

10h00 Presidency: Frédéric Crahay, Historian, Memory of Auschwitz/Auschwitz Foundation (Belgium): **Questions of terminology** (NL)

10h20 Paul Bernard-Nouraud, EHESS-CRAL (France): **The margins of the camps and the outlines of the exemplary figure of the "Muselman"** (FR)

10h50 Patrice Bensimon, Yad In-Unum (France): **Yahad-In Unum and the Holocaust by bullet** (FR)

11h20 Discussion

11h40 Coffee Break

12h00 Christophe Busch, Kazerne Dossin/Mechelen (Belgium): **Demonic transitions, how ordinary people are able committing of extraordinary evil** (NL)

12h30 Pavel Polian, Russian Academy of Sciences (Russia): **The Russian sources to the history of the Sonderkommando** (ENG)

13h00 Discussion

13h20 Lunch

HISTORIOGRAPHY

14h30 Presidency: Herman Van Goethem, Kazerne Dossin (Mechelen): Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights (Belgium)

14h40 Peter Klein, Hamburg Foundation for promotion of science and culture (Germany): **"Arbeitsjuden" extermination camp at Kulmhof's 1941-1945** (ENG)

15h10 Sarah Berger, Fondazione Museo della Shoah (Italy): **The Jewish prisoners working in the extermination Areas of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka** (ENG)

15h40 Discussion

16h00 Coffee Break

16h20 Jean-François Forges, Historian (France): **The workplaces of the Sonderkommandos in the history of the killing centres** (FR)

16h50 Piotr Setkiewicz, State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Poland): **New investigations about the Bunkers I and II in Auschwitz-Birkenau** (ENG)

17h20 Discussion

23 - 24 - 25 May 2013

Friday, the 24th of May 2013 IPC - Residence Palace

HISTORIOGRAPHY (CONTINUED)

09h45 Presidency: János Frühling, hon. prof., Faculty of Medicine at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)

10h00 János Frühling: **Miklós Nyiszli, the former prosecutor of dr. J. Mengele** (FR)

10h10 Sonja Knopp, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany): **The Jewish "Sonderkommando" in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The "inner" perspective from diaries and interviews** (ENG)

10h40 Igor Bartosik, State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Poland): **Escapes from Auschwitz Sonderkommando** (ENG)

11h10 Discussion

11h30 Coffee Break

11h50 Sila Cehreli, University of Marmara, Istanbul (Turkey): **From history to historiography, jewish resistance at Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka** (FR)

12h20 Carlo Saletti, House of Izio (France-Italy): **Comparison of extermination by gas and bullets. A critic on the concept of industrialization** (FR)

12h50 Discussion

13h00 Lunch

TESTIMONIALS

14h00 Presidency: Philippe Mesnard

14h10 Batia Baum, Maison de la Culture Yiddish – Medem Library (France): **To translate the Sonderkommandos** (FR)

14h40 Véronique Chevillon, Éducation Nationale (France): **When will we hear "The Scream" by David Olère?** (FR)

15h10 Frediano Sessi, Università degli Studi di Brescia, Mantova (Italy): **To witness, to tell, to rebuild: texts and words of the men of the Sonderkommando** (FR)

15h40 Discussion

16h00 Coffee Break

16h20 Marcello Pezzetti, Museo della Shoah Foundation (Italy): **The testimony of Shlomo Venezia** (FR)

16h50 Gideon Greif, Tel Aviv University (Israel): **The contribution of the research to the Sonderkommando understanding and interpretation of the "Final Solution" in Auschwitz-Birkenau/The religious world of the Sonderkommando prisoners** (ENG)

17h30 Discussion

Saturday, the 25th of May 2013 Royal Library

THE OPENING TO THE PUBLIC

10h00 Presidency: Aurélia Kalisky, Zentrum für Literaturforschung (Berlin)

10h10 Philippe Mesnard: **Images of the Sonderkommandos** (FR)

10h40 Michaël Prazan, writer-director (France): **The Sonderkommandos through mass executions in the former USSR** (FR)

11h10 Jean Cohen (Greece): **The 7th of October 1944: The revolt of the Sonderkommando in Birkenau** (FR)

11h40 Different views on the event: round table

Localisation

**International Press Center –
Residence Palace – Polak room (23-24)
Rue de la Loi 155, 1040 Brussels**
(Subway: Schuman)

**Royal Library of Belgium – Lippens room (25)
Boulevard de l'Empereur 4, 1000 Brussels**
(Subway: Gare centrale)

**All interventions are simultaneously
translated (ENG - FR - NL)**

**Free inscription
Reservation required**