

# The World That Once Was



Rabbi Leib Langfus  
BOCA RATON SYNAGOGUE  
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# Auschwitz

“Someone will say it was only a year / Three times four months/  
But I say there were days / And nights without end / Each day had twelve hours / Each night even hundred minutes / Each minute sixty seconds / And each second – Immeasurable suffering.”



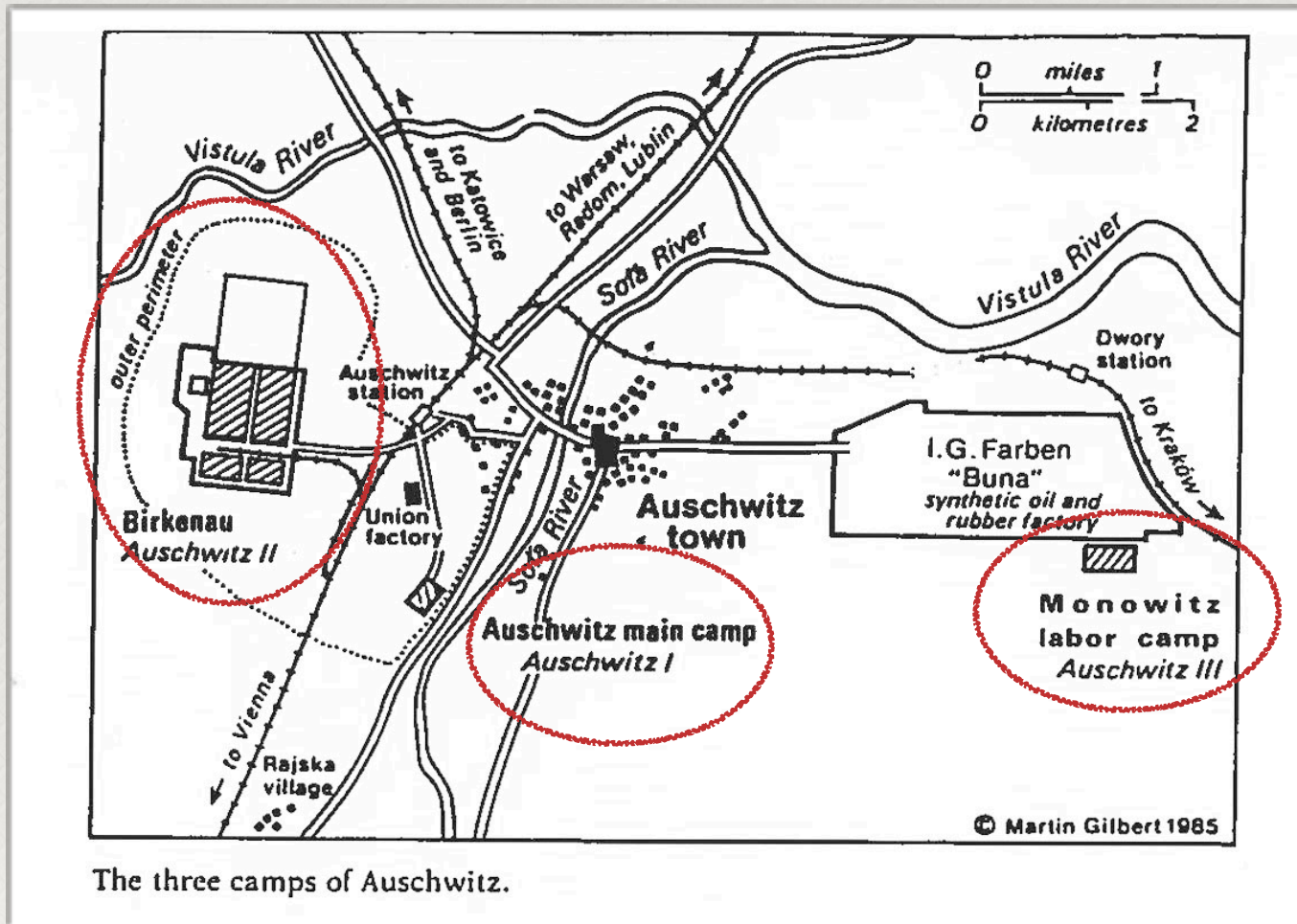
# Auschwitz - Key Dates

- *First shipment – June 14, 1940 from Tarnow (political activity and economic crimes)*
- *By midsummer 1941 it began to function as a death factory for the murder of the innocent*
- *First mass murder – July 28 1941*
- *September 3, 1941 – first experiment of Zyklon B*
- *Existed until January 27, 1945*



*Prisoners of the first transport at the railway station in Tarnów. 14th June 1940*

# Auschwitz I, II, III

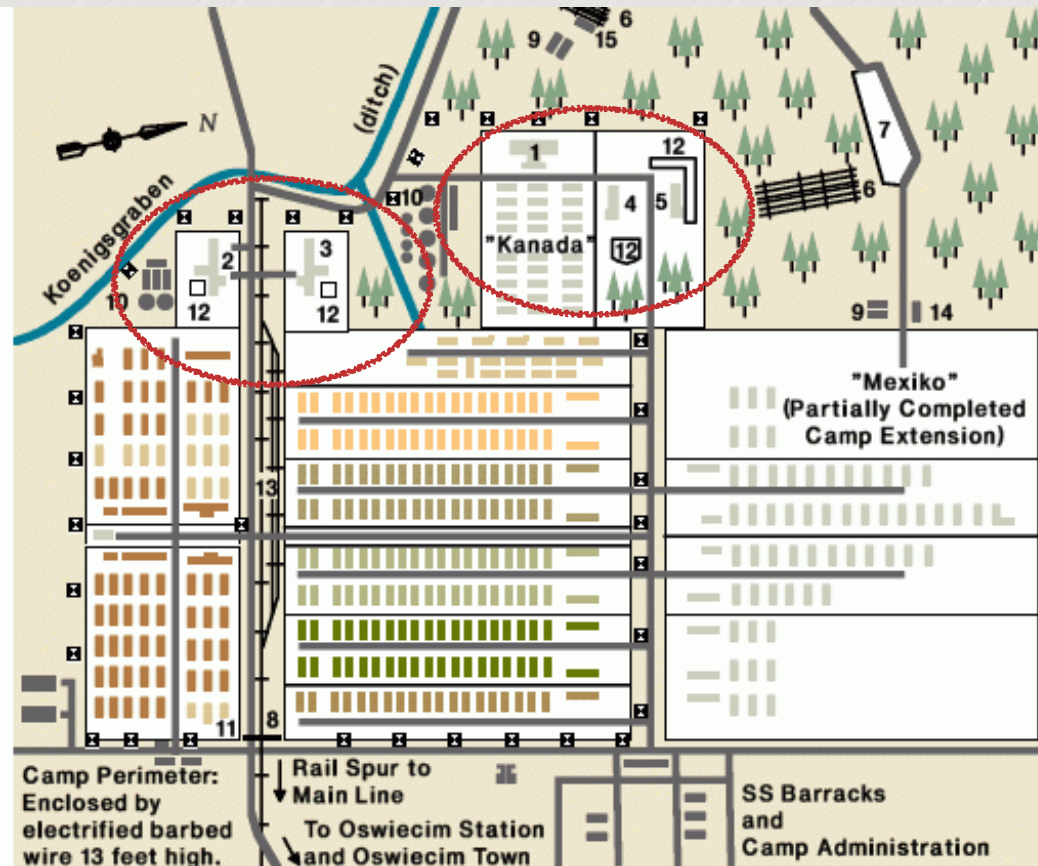


The three camps of Auschwitz.

# Map of Auschwitz

## SELECTED FEATURES

1. "Sauna" (Disinfection)
2. Gas Chamber and Crematorium #2
3. Gas Chamber and Crematorium #3
4. Gas Chamber and Crematorium #4
5. Gas Chamber and Crematorium #5
6. Cremation Pyres
7. Mass Graves for Soviet POWs
8. Main Guard House
9. Barracks for Disrobing
10. Sewage Treatment Plants
11. Medical Experiments Barrack
12. Ash Pits
13. "Rampe" (Railroad Platform)
14. Provisional Gas Chambers #1
15. Provisional Gas Chambers #2



## AUSCHWITZ II (BIRKENAU) CAMP SUMMER 1944

### CAMP PLAN LEGEND

- Roads
  - +— Railroads
  - Barbed Wire
  - Buildings
  - Theresienstadt Family Camp
  - Gypsy Camp
  - Medical Barracks
  - Men's Camp
  - Men's Quarantine Camp
  - Hungarian Women's Camp
  - Women's Camp
  - Watchtowers
  - Wooded Area
- Camp Plan Not to Scale

# Map of Auschwitz



# Arriving at Auschwitz

- Between 1942 and 1944, Jews were brought to Auschwitz from 13 European nations (Italy, Belgium, Greece, Germany, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Austria, France, Poland, Norway, and the Soviet Union.)
- Hungarian Jews began on May 15, 1944 and continued until October. 88 “shipments” contained some 400,000 Jews.



# Sonderkommando

- ✿ A unit of Jewish prisoners employed in the crematoria
- ✿ Tasks included extraction of gold teeth, undress the victims in the “sauna”, cremation of bodies, heating the giant furnaces and cleaning them out.
- ✿ The most terrifying job in the camps. Many committed suicide to avoid their jobs.





# Moral Composition of the Sonderkommando

“The Sonderkommando was no school of virtue. Most of the Sonderkommando were not among the moral elite of the camp. But how can one expect that under such conditions, human beings would not become animals, or would not become robots... dragging corpses, burning bodies, and perhaps encountering dear, familiar faces?” (Olga Wormser)

# Eyewitness

“The Sonderkommandos were often reproached for not having shown resistance. But did not I, did not we all obey orders without question? Their faces were blackened from the burning wood and soot. Their wild and terrifying look was startled as that of a wild beast. All the inmates wanted to stay alive, and so did they.”

# I. Maria Elzbieta Jazierska (Camp # 2449)

“Let no one judge another guilty who does not know the taste of hopelessness in the depths of extinction. For what could they have done? Could they have told those newly arrived on the station platform that they were going to their death? That would have resulted in their dying in full in shocking knowledge of their fate. But it would not have change that fate, nor would it have managed to pass on to others far away the news of their elimination. Their attempts to rebel or protest would have been in vane and for naught...

## II. Maria Elzbieta Jazierska (Camp # 2449)

“Even if they could have succeeded in momentarily saving someone from the hands of the SS, the entire area was surrounded with barbed wire fences, a ring of sentries, and beyond that – occupied Poland. The Germans enjoyed a limitless rule throughout, and a Jewish physiognomy was tantamount to a death sentence. Free men become filled with anger when their peers refuse to take up arms in defense of their honor in their lives. But the Sonderkommando were prisoners in the dreadful days of death and shame, in the huge death factory called Auschwitz. Do not hasten to judge.”

### III. Maria Elzbieta Jazierska (Camp # 2449)

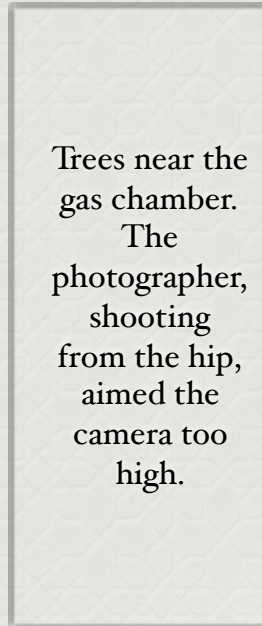
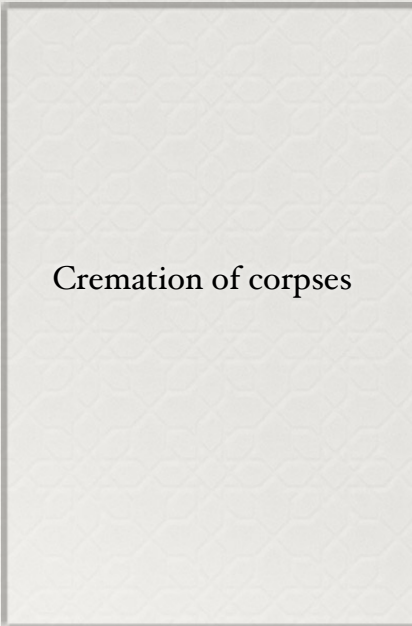
“No small number of these people became notoriously wild in the course of their work; these thought of nothing but the saving of their own skin and their own pleasure, such as the drinking to excess of alcoholic beverages brought with them by the condemned. Others became bestial; their senses were dulled and they became totally indifferent to their work. For evil does indeed engender evil. But the Germans did not succeed in corrupting them all. This can be attested to by living men, who were saved through the aid of the Sonderkommandos.”

# Successes of the Sonderkommando

- ✦ *Delivering money and jewelry found on the corpses to the polish resistance movements.*
- ✦ *Photograph testimony of the agony which took place on the way from the sauna to the gas chambers*
- ✦ *Revolt of 1944*



Women being taken to the gas chamber



# Revolt of 1944

- ✦ *663 men. 169 each at Crematoria 2,3,4 and 156 at Crematorium 5*
- ✦ *October 7, 1944 - prisoners assigned to Crematorium IV rebel after learning that they were going to be killed.*
- ✦ *Using smuggled gunpowder, the leaders of the Sonderkommando planned to destroy the gas chambers and crematoria, and launch the uprising.*





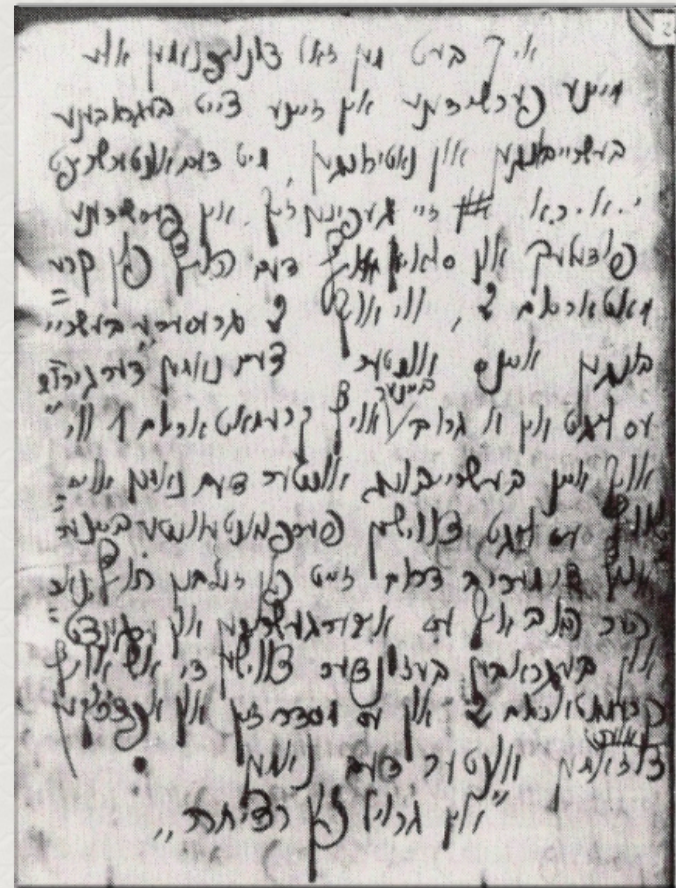
# Testimony about the Revolt

*“They set up a loud shout, hurled themselves upon the guards with hammers and axes, wounded some of them, the rest they beat with what they could get at, they pelted them with stones without further ado.*

*It is easy to imagine what was the upshot of this. Few moments had passed when a whole detachment of SS men drove in, armed with machine guns and grenades. There were so many of them that each had two machine guns for one prisoner. Even such an army was mobilized against them.”*

# The Scrolls of Auschwitz

- These blood soaked documents were buried underground under the heaps of martyred bones and ashes in the crematoria area.
- Most documents were lost. Only 6 manuscripts written by three authors were found.
  1. Zalman Gradowski
  2. Zalman Loewenthal
  3. Rabbi Leib Langfus - 2 parts: a) Concrete images of various tragic events in the camps b) Life in the Blezec Labor Camp



# Documenting History

"Dear finder of these notes, I have one request of you, which is, in fact, the practical objective for my writing ... that my days of Hell, that my hopeless tomorrow will find a purpose in the future. I am transmitting only a part of what happened in the Birkenau-Auschwitz Hell. You will realize what reality looked like ... From all this you will have a picture of how our people perished." - Zalman Gradowski

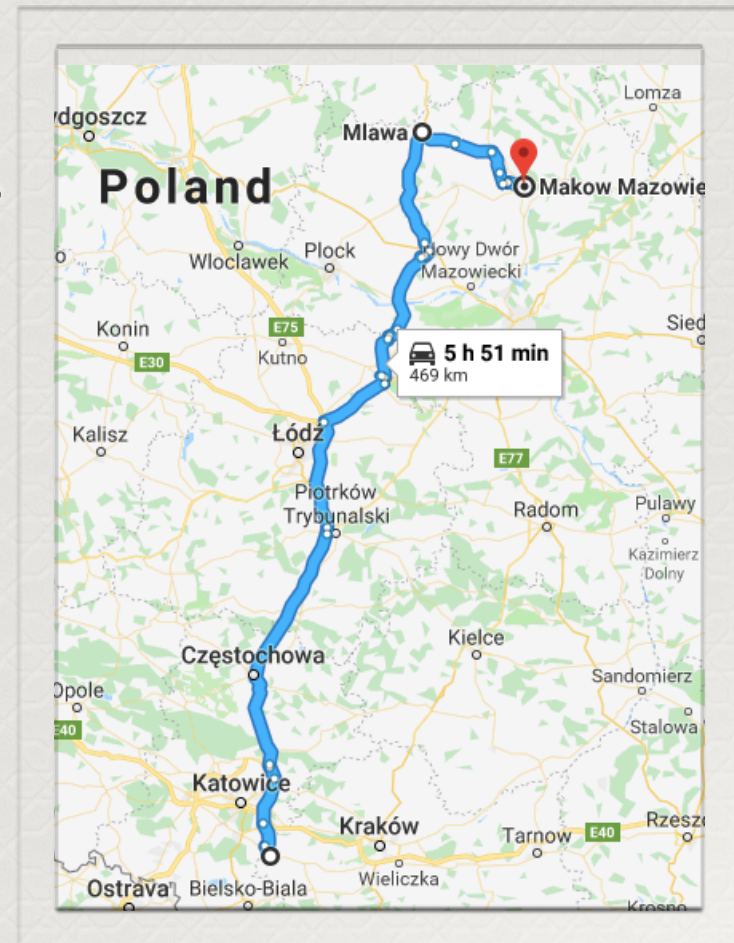


# Rabbi Leib Langfus

- ✦ *Born in Warsaw*
- ✦ *In 1033/4 marries Devora, the daughter of Dayan Shmuel Yosef Rosental, the local rabbi of Maków Mazowiecki.*
- ✦ *Following the marriage, he settles in the town and served as a dayan (was known as "Der Makover Dayan"), and they have a son, Shmuel.*
- ✦ *Studies at the Suzmir Yeshiva.*

# Rabbi Leib Langfus

- *November 18, 1942 – Langfus and his family, together with the entire population from Maków Mazowiecki (around 3,500) are transferred, first to were deported to Mława, from there, on December 7, to Auschwitz and on the 10<sup>th</sup> to Birkenau.*
- *Langfus, his wife and one son were among the group - his wife and son were gassed immediately upon arrival.*
- *His shipment numbered 3,000 and 70 were chosen for the Sonderkommando, among them Leib Langfus.*



# Rabbi Leib Langfus

- ✿ *He was protected and was not among those forced to burn the bodies nor be present when the victims were being rushed to the gas chambers. He swept the crematorium courtyard or stood guard at the entrance.*
- ✿ *“On principle, I was never present when the Jews were being rushed to their death, as it might have come to pass that the SS would force me to carry out their murderous purposes in the crematorium.”*
- ✿ *Most likely died after November 26, 1944*

# Biography of fellow Sonderkommando, Filip Müller

"We should be alone, without a family, without relatives, without friends, without a place we might call our own, condemned to roam the world aimlessly. For us there would be neither peace nor rest of mind, until one day we would die in some corner, lonely and forsaken. Therefore, brothers, let us now go to meet death bravely and with dignity!" ~ Rabbi Leib Langfus



# The Scrolls of Auschwitz

*Ber Mark*

*p. 206-214*

