

New Exhibition Marking 27 January
International Holocaust Remembrance Day:

Architecture of Murder

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Blueprints

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■ The Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex was planned as a mammoth building project that would take years to complete and that, in fact, was never concluded. A number of companies and organizations were involved in the construction, as well as thousands of workers, both German and foreign. A building project of this magnitude naturally created a vast quantity of red tape, including technical paperwork.

While planning the camp complex, the offices and companies involved in the project prepared hundreds of sketches of the various building sites. Draftsmen for the SS, prisoners with technical skills and civilian experts prepared the plans, which assisted the contractors in presenting the project and performing the construction work. Amongst other detailed sketches were those for the gas chambers and crematoria.

Copies of administration documents – including the plans – were preserved in an archive next to the main camp. Prior to the evacuation of the camps in January 1945, the Germans burned the archive of the camp's headquarters, but missed that of the construction corps, kept in a separate building. As a result, with the liberation of the camp an appreciable portion of these documents fell into Soviet hands, and was transferred to Moscow. Copies found by the Poles were eventually placed in the Auschwitz Museum. The plans finally became accessible to the public with the fall of the Eastern Bloc and the opening of archives in Eastern Europe.

In 2008, 29 original yellowing drawings were found in an abandoned apartment in Berlin, including 15 original plans of the Auschwitz complex. The mass circulation German paper *Bild*, owned by the Axel-Springer publishing house, acquired the diagrams and, after authentication by experts at the German Federal Archives, published their discovery. After being displayed in a temporary exhibition in Berlin, *Bild*'s editor-in-chief, Kai Diekmann, presented them last August to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev for safekeeping on the Mount of Remembrance.

The drawings housed at Yad Vashem are dated between 1941 and 1943 and include plans to expand Auschwitz I, the original plans for Birkenau, and sketches of various buildings in the camps and surrounding areas. Among others they present the evolution of Birkenau in October 1941. One of the Birkenau plans bears the signature of Heinrich Himmler, as well as the head of the SS building department, Hans Kammler. On another, Auschwitz commandant Rudolph Höss signed his name. The plans also include an early sketch of Crematorium II.

Marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day, on 25 January Yad Vashem will open a temporary exhibition entitled "Architecture of Murder," displaying

The SS militiamen cynically enjoyed admonishing the prisoners: "...we have won the war against you; none of you will be left to bear witness... there will perhaps be suspicions, discussions, research by historians, but there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidence together with you."

Primo Levi, quoted in the new Yad Vashem Exhibition, "Architecture of Murder"

the sketches in the context of the "everyday people" whose decisions and actions led to the construction of the largest extermination center of European Jewry.

Alongside the sketches, visitors will be able to view an aerial photo of the massive complex, the Vrba-Wetzler Report (written by two Jewish



■ SS officers amidst building plans at the head office of the Auschwitz Central Construction Directorate. Yad Vashem Archives

escapees from Auschwitz in 1944), an album displaying pictures of the camp's construction, and quotes from SS men and Jewish inmates describing the site and its murderous purposes. Also on display will be a copy of the poem "Death Fugue" by Paul Celan, in which the renowned poet shatters the common image of the Nazi by refusing to describe the Germans as monsters, portraying them instead as human beings who, by choosing evil, surrendered their sense of morality.

The exhibition opening will coincide with a seminar for the Diplomatic Corps in Israel in the presence of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A variety of honored guests from Israel and abroad will be present, including a special delegation of Yad Vashem Friends Societies from Canada and from Germany, and Holocaust survivors. Participants will hear the Prime Minister, Minister of Education Gideon Saar, Prof. Shlomo Avineri, Prof. Moshe Halbertal, Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Council Rabbi Israel Meir Lau,

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Director Dr. Piotr Cywiński, Axel-Springer CEO Dr. Mathias Döpfner and Holocaust survivor Ruth Bondy, among other distinguished speakers.

"Architecture of Murder" will remain open to the public at Yad Vashem's Exhibitions Pavilion until the end of February, after which parts of the exhibition will be displayed in the entrance of the Archives and Library Building at Yad Vashem. Marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a traveling version of the exhibition will also open in the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 26 January 2010, supported by Michaela and Leon Constantiner and Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"Architecture of Murder" was curated by Director of Yad Vashem's Museums Division Yehudit Inbar and designed by Pnina Friedman. The exhibition is funded thanks to the generous support of the Greg Rosshandler and Harry Perelberg families, Australia.

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