

Auschwitz after the Nazis: from *Scenariusz S* (1954) to the Yarnton Declaration (1992) and Beyond

An annotated translation of Scenariusz S, a key document in the evolution of the memorial site at Auschwitz since 1945, acting as the basis for a series of interviews with signatories of the Yarnton Declaration. This in turn will be the basis for a projected history of the Auschwitz Museum since 1979.

Auschwitz is probably the most important symbol of the Holocaust and, given the sheer scale of the crimes committed on the site, justifiably so: approximately 1.1 million people were murdered there, of whom 90% were Jews from communities as geographically and culturally diverse as Amsterdam and Salonika. The inscriptions on the Birkenau memorial in the twenty-three languages of the victims are a grim testimony to the universal significance of a site that has become the common cultural property of not just Europe but of the entire world. 'After Auschwitz' has many meanings.

For the twenty million visitors who have visited the site, Auschwitz-Birkenau, the death camp, is barely distinguishable from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. As a visitor passes through what remains of Auschwitz I, so he or she passes through a series of museum exhibits. Despite the central role the museum has played in the preservation of the site and the communication of its history, and despite the continuing way in which it structures most visits to the site, its internal history has been relatively little studied. What literature there is in Polish has rarely been translated and in English there are only a small number of partial studies. Jonathan Huener's *Auschwitz, Poland and the Politics of Commemoration 1945-1979* (Athens OH, 2003) is useful on the evolution of the site in the initial post-war period; information on specific topics can be pieced together from works like James Young's *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven, 1993), on the 1967 competition to erect a memorial in Birkenau, or Sybille Steinbacher's *Auschwitz* (London, 2005), which spends some time on the post-war significance of the site. Articles in journals such as *Polin* supplement this to an extent while *ProMemoria*, the Museum's journal, has also published material

on the early history of the museum, particularly in the special edition of 1997 commemorating its 50th anniversary.

This neglect partly reflects the inaccessibility to most scholars of Polish primary material, but this is not the only reason. Access to key primary documents has been restricted while record keeping in the museum, particularly during the immediate postwar decades, was erratic. Partly this reflected the nature of the museum staff, a tightly-knit community of survivors and their families. They relied on fairly informal approaches to the museum's management and decision-making and by not writing things down they sought to evade the ideological scrutiny of their museological decisions by the communist authorities (the museum was and remains the direct responsibility of the Polish Ministry of Culture). For these reasons, records of commissioning and decommissioning of exhibits are scarce and incomplete and crucial aspects of the museum's exhibition and other strategies in the 1950s and 60s remain little understood. Of particular importance was the decision to convert the building now known as Crematorium I (on the Auschwitz I site), taken and implemented without leaving a documentary record, except for the testimonies of some survivors who participated in the work. Similarly, the reasons for the closure of exhibitions in Blocks 15, 21 and 27 in the period 1965-1978 are unclear. These decisions were made against the backdrop of the development of Holocaust commemorative cultures and a period of renewed insecurity for the Jewish population of Poland. Major commemorative projects like the Birkenau memorial were completed; the Holocaust emerged as a subject of study in its own right in the wake of the capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann; and for the Polish specialist, this was also the period of the 'March Events' of 1968, in which most of Poland's remaining Jews were 'encouraged' to emigrate. It can be no coincidence that the exhibition at the Museum on 'Martyrology of the Jews' was closed around the same time. Finding a means of making better sense of these museum processes is not only essential to our understanding of Auschwitz after the Nazis, but the precarious position of Poland's remaining Jews and how they negotiated their status as Poles.

This project seeks to begin thinking through these issues through an authoritative and complete translation of a key document. *Scenariusz S* ran to more than 90 pages and laid out in minute detail the documents, photographs and other artefacts to be displayed in the museum's 'permanent exhibition'. Written by former inmate Kazimierz Smoleń in 1954, his scenario was erected a year later when he had been appointed Director of the Museum. He remained in this post until the early 1990s, when his apparent attachment to the communist-era estimate of the number of Auschwitz victims was rendered untenable by research by Franciszek Piper, the head of the museum's Historical Department (*Yad Vashem Studies 21* (1991)). *Scenariusz S* thus constitutes a prolonged and detailed account of how the museum's leading custodian viewed the site and its history, and establishes what visitors to the museum in the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s saw on their visits. It would also therefore provide an authoritative basis for documenting the changes made in the 1990s after the collapse of communism and according to the Yarnon Declaration of 1992. By working on *Scenariusz S* in conjunction with research into the photographic archive at the museum, it would be possible to produce an edition of the text that would not only give the reader a real sense of the nature of the communist-era exhibition but also provide a basis for further commentary and research.

A discrete project in itself, work on *Scenariusz S* would be preparatory to examining the ways in which Auschwitz has changed and evolved as a symbol and as a subject of international discourse about the Holocaust since the 1990s. This aspect of the project would be explored through interviews with signatories of the Yarnon Declaration, reflecting on the recommendations made and how they have affected the site and Holocaust memory. This would be the start of a long-range project to produce a history of the Auschwitz Museum in the period 1979-2005: in other words, from the visit by Pope John Paul II, through the collapse of communism in 1989-1990 and the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day, to the sixtieth anniversary ceremonies on the fifth European Holocaust Memorial Day in 2005. Research on the Yarnon Declaration and its legacy might also provide insight into the changing nature of Polish-Jewish

relations in the post-communist period. By looking at one of the key documents from the communist era in detail, a sense of clarity about what was being negotiated could be obtained, placing the subsequent controversies about Jewish and Polish memory and memorialisation of Auschwitz in a more grounded context. I feel this would be a useful addition to the literature and a valuable contribution to the understanding of Holocaust memory in the twenty-first century.

Timetable

An initial stage (6-8 months) spent translating the document while researching the Yarnton Declaration and associated conferences in Yarnton, Krakow and Auschwitz. A second stage (6-8 months) spent interviewing participants before a final stage (3 months) of writing up.

Outcomes

The possible outcomes of this project might include, but are not limited to:

- Publication of the translated text, either as a document in an appropriate journal (for example, *Polin*) or as part of a more substantial collection of documents on the Yarnton process.
- An article on the Yarnton process and *Scenariusz S* for a journal such as *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*.
- A conference at which participants in the Yarnton Declaration would meet and review their decisions in the light of posterity. This in turn could form the basis for an edited collection of contributions.