



The Persecution of Roma and Sinti in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

Michal Schuster, Aletta Beck

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Next to the Jews, the Nazis also persecuted Roma and Sinti, whom they categorized as „racial gypsies and gypsy half-breeds“ on basis of their racial ideology. In both cases, the persecution was based on prejudices held by people all over Europe that had been maintained and nurtured for centuries. For most Europeans, anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism were integral parts of their general view of the world. For many Europeans, this is still true today.

The persecution of Roma and Sinti in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (below just „Protectorate“) built upon the practices of the first Czechoslovak Republic and was gradually transformed into the openly racist policy the Nazis pursued also elsewhere. People officially labelled as „gypsies“ were discriminated by restrictive laws and regulations, mostly adopted from the Reich, which were put into practice by officials and police officers. An important part of the persecution was the forced concentration of people labeled „gypsies and gypsy half-breeds“, in special concentration camps officially called „gypsy camps“. The subsequent mass murder of those considered „racial gypsies and gypsy half-breeds“ took place in the „Gypsy camp“ in Auschwitz-Birkenau and was almost completed in other concentration camps and their branches, or on death marches from those camps shortly before the end of WWII.

Behind this austere summary hides a long and complex process of persecution, torture and murder of individual people – innocent victims, but also the decisions and actions of individual perpetrators, who participated in these events by initiating them, deciding on them, implementing them, agreeing with them or just silently watching bystanders. This text aims to describe the development of the policy of persecution of people described as „gypsies“ during the Protectorate and thus to contribute to the understanding of the general principles of human behavior leading to genocide.



Defining victims

When the Nazis occupied what had been left of the territory of the former Czechoslovakian state and established their occupation regime, they brought with them their racial ideology and thus the definition of „foreign races“ („artfremde Rassen“) as which they considered Jews, „Gypsies“ and „Negroes“.¹ As „Jews“², they didn't only consider those who also identified themselves as such, but also people, who, for example, came from families who had converted to Christianity several generations ago. They codified their definition of who was to be considered „jewish“ in the so-called Nuremberg Laws. The Nazis created a list of their future victims in a long and complicated process. They used official documents, documents of Jewish communities, and, in Germany, the census in order to compile a registry of those they considered to be „jewish“ solely for the purpose of their persecution.³ Concerning those they considered „gypsies“, they had to adapt their methods. The Nazi definition of „gypsies“ was based primarily on the pseudo-scientific research of Dr. Robert Ritter, who since 1936 headed the so-called „Research Institute for Racial Hygiene“ (Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle) at the Reich Health Office. This research institute used genealogical research in combination with police registers and pseudo-scientific anthropometric criteria to determine who counted as a „racial gypsy“ or „gypsy half-breed“. This process began later than the creation of the list of Jews in the Reich and took place mostly during the Second World War. After the establishment of the Protectorate, the Nazis quickly gained documents, which enabled them to also determine in the Czech lands who was a „Jew“ according to the definition of the Nuremberg Laws. However, they did not have similar documents regarding the „gypsies“.

There was though a police register of „Gypsies“, which the Czechoslovak police ran since 1925 and which was regulated by law No. 117/1927 Sb. „on wandering gypsies“. This law

1 Runderlass des RMI vom 26. November 1935 [Circular of the Reich Ministry of the Interior of 26 November 1935]. In: Ministerialblatt für die Preußische Innere Verwaltung 1935 [Ministerial Gazette for the Prussian Internal Administration 1935], pp. 1429–1934. Cited by: Anahid S. Rickmann, „Rassenpflege im völkischen Staat“. Zum Verhältnis der Rassenhygiene zur nationalsozialistischen Politik [„Tending to the Race in the völkisch State.“ On the relationship between racial hygiene and Nazi politics]. (Bonn, 2002), http://hss.ulb.uni-bonn.de/2002/0091/0091.pdf?origin=publication_detail. Accessed: 17 May 2020.

2 The quotation marks indicate the difference between legitimate self-identification and the illegitimate racist assignment of an „identity“ by the Nazis.

3 Aly Götz, Karl Heinz Roth, Die restlose Erfassung. Volkszählen, Identifizieren, Aussondern im Nationalsozialismus [Complete registration. Census, identification, exclusion in Nazism]. (Berlin, 1984/Frankfurt am Main, 2000); Alena Hájková, Evidence protektorátního židovského obyvatelstva [The registration of the Protectorate's Jewish population]. In: Terezínské studie a dokumenty (1997), pp. 45–54; Ibidem, Vznik a složení kartotéky židovských osob z let nacistické okupace [The origin and composition of the card file of Jewish persons from the years of the Nazi occupation]. In: Terezínské studie a dokumenty (2000), pp. 347–354.



defined „gypsies“ based on lifestyle. Paragraph 1 of that law was worded as follows: „According to this law, wandering gypsies are considered to be gypsies wandering from place to place and other workshy wanderers who live in the gypsy way of life, even if they have a permanent residence for part of the year, especially the winter.“⁴

The vague definition of „wandering gypsies“ in this law reflects the general understanding of the term „gypsy“ in the Czech society of that time. „Gypsies“ were considered on the one hand Roma and Sinti as an ethnic group (then called „Gypsies“, in Czech written uppercase), and, on the other, everyone who resembled the imagination of this group based on prejudices and stereotypes („gypsies“, in Czech written lowercase, eg. vagrants, wandering grinders, umbrella repairers, wandering merchants, small carousel operators). The Dictionary of the Czech Language from 1937 states that a „gypsy“ is a „member of the wandering nation of Gypsies“, but also a „rogue, liar, impostor“ in general.⁵

Before the Nazis used the beforementioned police register for their own purposes, various other measures from the Reich were adopted in the Protectorate.

The occupation and implementation of German laws and regulations

Once the Protectorate was established, the Protectorate government gradually adopted all the „anti-Gypsy“ regulations that were implemented in Nazi Germany during the 1930s. At first, however, the new regime used the legal measures and the practical implementation of the persecution of the population described as „gypsies“, based primarily on the First Czechoslovak Republic’s law No. 117/27 of 15 July 1927 „On wandering gypsies and people living in a gypsy way“. People who were labeled „gypsies“ under this law were, among other things, denied access to certain areas, such as border areas, spas, certain districts of larger cities, etc.⁶ By decree of the Protectorate Minister of the Interior Josef Ježek of 30 November 1939, all „wandering gypsies“ were banned from travelling by the end of January, 1940 and were ordered to settle either in their home village, that is the village where they legally possessed a right of residence⁷, or in the place they were currently staying. The settlement itself did not proceed smoothly, as

4 Zákon č. 117/1927 Sb. o potulných cikánech [Law No. 117/1927 Sb. on „wandering gypsies“], <http://ftp.aspi.cz/opispdf/1927/052-1927.pdf>. Accessed: 17 May 2020.

5 Pavel Váša, František Trávníček, Slovník jazyka českého [Dictionary of the Czech language]. Volume 1. (Praha, 1937), p. 170.

6 Ctibor Nečas, Romové v České republice včera a dnes [Roma in the Czech Republic yesterday and today]. (Olomouc, 1999), p. 66.

7 This „right of residence“ originates from austrian-hungarian rule and was in use in the Czech lands until 1949. Broadly speaking, this „right of residence“ functioned similarly to today’s citizenship concerning the rights of residence and access to social services, though it affiliated a person not to the whole state but a municipality.



municipalities often tried to prevent the settlement of „wandering gypsies” by expelling them from their district or denying them the right of residence. After settlement, people were practically under the constant control of local gendarmes, and the Protectorate administration could use periodic reports from individual offices to clarify their records. A census counted a total of 6,540 „gypsies” in the Protectorate on April 1, 1940.⁸



Ill. 1.: A Roma family after forced settlement, 1940.

One of the possible punishments for non-compliance with the travel ban was imprisonment in disciplinary work camps. These camps were opened on August 10, 1940 in Lety u Písku and in Hodonín u Kunštátu. The decree on their establishment was approved by the Czecho-Slovak government of Rudolf Beran on March 2, 1939, thus before the establishment of the Protectorate. The disciplinary work camps served for the internment of „workshy” men, including „wandering gypsies fit for work”. Men older than eighteen years who could not prove their source of livelihood were to be placed in

⁸ Ctibor Nečas, *Českoslovenští Romové v letech 1938–1945* [The Czechoslovak Roma in 1938–1945]. (Brno, 1994), pp. 33–34; *Ibidem*, *Roma in the Czech Republic yesterday and today*, p. 67.



disciplinary labor camps.⁹ After the ban on nomadism, men from Roma families who would still travel also were seen as „unable to prove their source of livelihood“. Prisoners of the disciplinary labor camps considered „gypsies“ were identified in the camp records by a capital letter „C“ (ie, „cikán“ or „gypsy“). Depending on the season, they usually made up 5 to 25% of all internees.¹⁰

An important step in the development of Nazi persecution in the Protectorate was Regulation No. 89/42 Sb. on the „preventive fight against crime“, which was a copy of the German decree of the same name issued by the German chief of SS and Heinrich Himmler in 1937. The Protectorate government chaired by Jaroslav Krejčí adopted the decree and issued it on March 9, 1942. Among other things, the criminal police were given the right to impose indefinite detention in newly established detention camps on „those who threaten the public with their asocial behavior“. This „preventive detention“ was the official legal basis for imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps.¹¹ According to the relevant definition, „asocial“ was a person who „even if not by criminal behavior directed against the community, indicates that he does not intend to join the community“. This very vague definition thus allowed the persecution of hundreds of men and women, who were imprisoned in various detention and concentration camps without a court order.

The regulation No. 89/42 Sb. defined „gypsies and gypsy nomads“ as „asocials“ and contained „special provisions on gypsies“: „Gypsies and people living in a gypsy way of life“ were forbidden to leave their officially assigned place of residence without prior permission of the Center for criminal investigation in Prague.

The Center for criminal investigation in Prague was established during the alignment and integration of the Protectorate’s authorities into the Reich’s structure and was the unit responsible for the execution of the all measurements against “gypsies“. Until its effective establishment the Criminal department of the police headquarters in Prague were to fulfil the Center’s tasks.¹² The Center was the only authority eligible to issue

9 Vládní nařízení ze dne 2. března 1939 o kárných pracovních táborech [Government Order of 2 March 1939 on disciplinary labor camps]. In: Sběrka zákonů a nařízení státu československého [Collection of laws and regulations of the Czechoslovak state]. (Praha, 1939), pp. 368–370, <http://www.digitalniknihovna.cz/mzk/uuid/uuid:92c52e90-8681-11e9-b844-5ef3fc9ae867>. Accessed: 17 May 2020.

10 Nečas, Ctibor: Holocaust českých Romů. [The Holocaust of the Czech Roma.] (Prague, 1999), p. 18.

11 Michael P. Hensle, Die Verrechtlichung des Unrechts. Der legalistische Rahmen der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung [The juridification of injustice. The legal framework of Nazi persecution]. In: Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel (ed.): Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager [Place of terror. A history of Nazi concentration camps], Volume 1: Organisation des Terrors [Organization of terror], pp. 76–90.

12 Moravský zemský archiv [The Moravian Land Archives], B 124, Krajský národní výbor Brno [Regional national committee Brno], III. Manipulation, box 1871, inv. no. 1536, Zvl. příloha ke St. I/II-17-100-78 Ministersvo vnitřní,



travellers' ID cards. Travellers' ID cards issued by other authorities expired and were to be confiscated from their holders. The Center was also the only authority having the right to decide on the issuance of a license to operate a trade in a „wandering way”.¹³

With effect from 1 January 1942, the disciplinary labor camps in Lety u Písku and Hodonín u Kunštátu were converted into detention camps. Further, „preventive detention” in the Protectorate could be conducted in the coercive workhouses in Prague-Ruzyně, Pardubice and Brno (with a branch in Olšovec). The worst option for those subjected to this measure was deportation to the Auschwitz I concentration camp, later also to the Buchenwald and Ravensbrück concentration camps. Among the several hundred people who were deported from the Protectorate from April 1942 to February 1944 as „asocials”, there were only a few Roma.¹⁴ Although the racial ideology of the Nazis linked Roma and Sinti to „asocials”, they did not equate these groups.



Ill. 2: Police identification card of Antonín Vrba, a prisoner of the detention camp in Lety u Písku, who was labelled as „asocial” by the protectorate authorities and subsequently imprisoned on 25 March 1942.

oběžník z 24. června 1942. [Special supplement to St I / II-17-100-78, Ministry of the Interior, Circular decree of 24 June 1942].

13 Vládní nařízení č. 89/42 Sb. ze dne 9. března 1942 o „preventivním potírání zločinnosti” [Government Decree No. 89/42 of the Collection of 9 March 1942 on the „Preventive Fight against Crime“]. In: Nové zákony a nařízení Protektorátu Čechy a Morava [New laws and regulations of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia]. (Praha, 1942), pp. 184–204, <http://www.digitalniknihovna.cz/mzk/uuid/uuid:d1e3c790-3635-11e4-8c14-5ef3fc9bb22f>. Accessed: 17 May 2020.

14 Nečas, Czechoslovak Roma 1938–1945, pp. 41–44; *Ibidem*, Holocaust, pp. 18–19; *Ibidem*, Roma yesterday and today, p. 68.



The „Gypsy“-census (August 2, 1942)

In the summer of 1942, Roma and Sinti in the Protectorate found themselves facing a form of persecution targeting them only on the basis of „race“, regardless of all other circumstances. Crucial was the adoption of the decree on „combating the gypsy plague“ by the Protectorate Minister of the Interior Richard Bienert on June 24, 1942, respectively its implementation order of July 10, 1942. The decree was issued by the commander-in-chief of the non-uniformed Protectorate Police Horst Böhme, whose office was assigned the agenda of „combating gypsy plague“ in the Protectorate.¹⁵ Again, it was a measure that copied the German regulation of the same name, which had been in force in the Reich since the end of 1938.¹⁶ Among other things, the decree ordered a new official register of all people labelled as „gypsies“. A similar census of „gypsies“ on the basis of the so-called Festsetzungserlass (decree on the permanent detention of „gypsies“ on the spot) had taken place in the Reich already in October 1939.¹⁷

15 Moravský zemský archiv [Moravian Land Archives], fund B 124, Krajský národní výbor Brno [Regional National Committee Brno], III. manipulation, box 1871, inv. n. 1536, Rozkaz generálního velitele neuniformované protektorátní policie z 10. července 1942 č. St I/II-17-100-78 „Potírání cikánského zlořádu“ [Order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Non-uniformed Protectorate Police of 10 July 1942 No. St I / II-17-100-78 „Combating gypsy plague“]. Böhme left the Protectorate in September 1942 and was replaced by Erwin Weinmann.

16 Michael Zimmermann, Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische „Lösung der Zigeunerfrage“ [Racial utopia and genocide. The Nazi „solution of the Gypsy question“]. (Hamburg, 1996), p. 220.

17 Karola Fings, Gutachten zum Schnellbrief des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes – Tvb. Nr. RKPA. 149/1939 -g- – vom 17. 10.1939 betr. „Zigeunererfassung“ („Festsetzungserlass“) [Expert opinion on the order of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt - Tvb. No. RKPA. 149/1939 -g- - of 17 October 1939 concerning the „local detention of gypsies“ („Festsetzungserlass“)]. (Köln, 2018). Available on: <https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/download/11145>. Accessed: 28 July 2020.



III. 3: „Gypsies put on the same level with the Jews“. In: Venkov. Orgán České strany agrární. [The Land. Organ of the Czech Agrarian Party], Prague, 11 April 1942, No. 37, p. 2.



III. 4: Title and first page of the order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Non-uniformed Protectorate Police of 10 July 1942 No. St I / II-17-100-78 „Combating the gypsy plague“.



Following the order on „Combating the gypsy plague”, protectorate gendarmerie and police in cooperation with the district and municipal authorities, registered all „gypsies, gypsy half-breeds and people living in a gypsy” according to the instructions of the German criminal police during 1 – 3 August, 1942. They prepared an extensive documentation on everyone, filled out questionnaires both in Czech and German, took photographs and fingerprints. Gendarmes and police officers were to pay special attention to the evaluation of all data on family background, going back three generations. All documents created during this process were to be handed over to the Center for criminal investigation in Prague. Specific instructions were given at a work meeting of the commanders of the criminal police departments, the commanders of gendarme stations and the commanders of „detention camps” taking place in Prague at the Center for criminal investigation, which was responsible for resolving the „gypsy question” in the Protectorate, on July 15, 1942. The documents were collected by the Reich Central Office for Combating the Gypsy Plague (“Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens”).¹⁸

The decision as to whether a person is a „gypsy” or a „gypsy half-breed” was left in the first instance to the individual police officers conducting the census. However, their decisions were preliminary.¹⁹ The Center for criminal investigation in Prague later made the final decision on „racial affiliation” and thus on the fate of individuals. It took them several months to complete this process.

18 Moravský zemský archiv [Moravian Land Archives], fund B 124, Krajský národní výbor Brno [Regional National Committee Brno], III. manipulation, box 1871, inv. n. 1536, fol. 761–766, Zvláštní příloha k Policejnímu věstníku pro Protektorát Čechy a Morava č. 4 z 23. července 1942, II. Všeobecně závazné pokyny, 4. Potírání cikánského zlořádu [Special Annex to the Police Gazette for the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia No. 4 of 23 July 1942, II. General binding instructions, 4. Combating gypsy plague].

19 Státní oblastní archiv Třeboň [State Regional Archives in Třeboň], fund Gypsy camp Lety, box 3, inv. n. 38, fol. 4–5, vyhláška o soupisu cikánů [decree on the census of gypsies].



Soupis cikánů v Protektorátu

Soupis cikánů, cikánských míšenců a osob, poutulujících se po způsobu cikánském, bude proveden na celém území Protektorátu Čechy a Morava dne 2. srpna 1942. Osoby, poutulující se po způsobu cikánském, jsou na příklad: kotláři, brusiči a kočovní trhovci, pokud nemají vlastní živnost se stálým bydlištěm. Osoby, podléhající soupisu, se dostaví označeného dne o 7. hodině ranní k služebnám protektorátní policie (vládní policie a četnictva), označeným v příslušných vyhláškách, jež byly vydány okresními a vládními policejními úřady. Ve dnech 1. až 3. srpna t. r. je zakázáno osobám, podléhajícím soupisu, opustit místo pobytu. **čt**

Ill. 5: „Census of Gypsies in the Protectorate“. In: *Lidové noviny*. [The people's newspaper], Brno, July 31, 1942, No. 50 (noon edition), p. 2.

Concentration in „gypsy camps“

In connection with the decree on „combating the gypsy plague“, the Protectorate's „Gypsy Camp I“ was established in Lety u Písku and „Gypsy Camp II“ in Hodonín u Kunštátu in the beginning of August, 1942. In these newly established concentration camps, first and foremost were to be interned people who met the conditions for the imposition of preventive police detention.²⁰

Officially, „gypsies and gypsy half-breeds who are not in permanent and productive work, along with all family members“, were to be imprisoned.²¹ However, even people who had a job could be deported when the labor office decided that it had no objections to their deportation.²² As part of the census, local police officers preliminarily identified 5,860 of

20 Moravský zemský archiv [Moravian Land Archives], fund B 124, Krajský národní výbor Brno [Regional National Committee Brno], III. manipulation, box 1871, inv. n. 1536, fol. 754–769, Rozkaz generálního velitele neuniformované protektorátní policie z 10. července 1942 č. St I/II-17-100-78 „Potírání cikánského zlořádu“ [Order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Non-uniformed Protectorate Police of 10 July 1942 No. St I / II-17-100-78 „Combating Gypsy plague“].

21 Ibid., Prováděcí směrnice k výnosu ministerstva vnitra č. D-1520-22/6-42-6/4 z 24. června 1942 „Potírání cikánského zlořádu“ [Implementing Directive to the Decree of the Ministry of the Interior No. D-1520-22 / 6-42-6 / 4 of 24 June 1942 „Combating the gypsy plague“].

22 As for example the employment office in Klatovy: Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni [State Regional Archives in Třeboň], fund Gypsy camp Lety, box 23, inv. n. 96, fol. 178, úřad práce Klatovy – pobočka Přeštice četnické stanici v Přešticích, 30. července 1942 [Employment office in Klatovy – Přeštice gendarmerie branch for the station in Přeštice, July 30, 1942].



the 11,886 people registered as „racial gypsies” or „half-breeds” throughout the Protectorate.²³ Of these, more than 1,300 people were imprisoned in the „Gypsy Camp I Lety u Písku”, almost 1,400 were imprisoned in the „Gypsy Camp II Hodonín u Kunštátu”.²⁴

Unlike the previous disciplinary work and detention camps operating in the same places, the conditions of imprisonment in the „Gypsy camps” were significantly worse and, in addition, those camps operated as „waiting rooms” for the deportation to the Auschwitz concentration or extermination camp. Indefinitely interned at the „Gypsy camps” were not only healthy adult men, but also women and children, the ill and the elderly.

Of the total number of approximately 2,700 prisoners imprisoned in the „gypsy camps” Lety u Písku and Hodonín u Kunštátu, several hundred died during their internment as a result of catastrophic living conditions, some were transported to the Auschwitz I concentration camp as so-called „asocials” and a small group was released from the camps but still subject to repressive measures. The biggest group of prisoners of the „gypsy camps” in the Protectorate was labeled as “gypsies ” and deported to the „gypsy camp” within the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, where most of them perished.²⁵

Deportations to Auschwitz

On December 16, 1942, the head of the German police and SS, Himmler issued the so-called Auschwitz-Erlass (Auschwitz decree), which ordered imprisonment for all „Gypsies, Gypsy half-breeds and non-German members of Roma groups of Balkan origin” in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination and concentration camp. This deportation order applied to the territory of the Great German Reich, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Himmler's decree was subsequently supplemented by the Reich Security Office on January 29, 1943 with an implementing directive and on January 30, 1943 containing instructions for the confiscation of the property of „gypsies” as “enemies of the Reich”.²⁶ At the same time, this decree marked the end of all other plans for the future of Roma and Sinti that the Nazis had previously discussed.

23 Nečas, Holocaust, p. 20.

24 Ibidem, p. 83; Ibidem, Pamětní seznam II. Hodonín [Commemorative list II. Hodonín]. (Praha, 2014), p. 9.

25 Ibidem, Holocaust, p. 67.

26 Nečas, Holocaust, pp. 20–21; Ibidem, Roma yesterday and today, p. 69; Ibidem, Romové na Moravě a ve Slezsku (1740–1945) [Roma in Moravia and Silesia (1740-1945)]. (Brno, 2005), p. 264.



The preparations for the deportations from the Protectorate were kept secret. The compilation of the transports was ordered by the German criminal police, and the execution itself was entrusted to the protectorate's criminal police and gendarmerie. Based on their „racial investigations“, the criminal police decided who they considered a „racial gypsy“ or „half-breed“ and because of this categorization would be deported.²⁷

Only those with good connections to that part of society that had contacts with the occupiers which could be made use of, had a certain chance to be excluded from the transports. One such case was the family of the famous Roma musician Jožka Kubík (1907–1978) from the village of Hrubá Vrbka.²⁸ There was also some hope for those with a lighter skin color, bribing police men sometimes worked, too. At the end of April 1943, the protectorate police in Moravia was reprimanded by the German criminal police for the „high number of exemptions“ it had granted. Most of these exemptions granted were revoked by the Criminal Central Office and the people concerned were deported anyway.²⁹

Originally, the Protectorate Criminal Police and the non-uniformed Protectorate Police had planned to deport the prisoners of the „gypsy camps“ in Lety u Písku and Hodonín u Kunštátu first. However, these plans were changed due to the typhus epidemic that broke out in both camps. Officials feared that the epidemic could spread into the Auschwitz concentration camp, and so those men, women and children labelled as “racial gypsies and half-breeds” but so far living outside of the camps were deported first.

In larger cities connected to the railway, they were gathered for several days at so-called collection points – in occupied gyms, inns and other facilities, where they spent several days before the transport. All their money and property were taken from them, in many cases stolen, sold at public auctions or confiscated by the Reich.³⁰

After the transport was assembled, the journey by rail in freight wagons without food and drink to the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp followed. There, Roma and Sinti from the Reich and other European countries directly controlled by the Nazis were imprisoned in a special section B-II-e called the „Gypsy Family Camp“, where over

27 For example: Státní oblastní archiv Třeboň [State Regional Archives in Třeboň], fund Gypsy camp Lety, box 14, inv. n. 75; see also Ctibor Nečas, *Cikánský tábor v Letech (1942–1943)* [The Gypsy camp in Lety (1942–1943)]. In: Romano džaniben (2008) 15, pp. 186–197, p. 187–188; *Ibidem*, Holocaust, pp. 20, 83; Zimmermann, *Racial utopia and genocide*, pp. 221–222.

28 Nečas, *Czechoslovak Roma 1938–1945*, p. 71; *Ibidem*, Špalíček romských miniatur. Osoby a dějství z romského dramatu, které se odvíjelo na scéně historické Moravy. [Some Roma miniatures. Characters and acts from the Roma drama, which took place on the scene of historical Moravia]. Brno 2008, p. 114–115.

29 *Ibidem*, *Czechoslovak Roma 1938–1945*, p. 73; *Ibidem*, *Roma in Moravia and Silesia (1740–1945)*, p. 296.

30 *Ibidem*, *Czechoslovak Roma 1938–1945*, pp. 70–71.



22,000 Roma and Sinti men, women and children were gradually interned. Most of them died there.³¹

The first mass transport of protectorate Roma, numbering 1,038 people, left Brno on March 6, 1943.³² During 1943, further transports followed from various parts of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as from both „gypsy camps“, arriving in Auschwitz on March 10 (the transport sent from Prague numbered 650 people), March 19 (1,048 people from Olomouc). On May 7, the transport of prisoners left the camp in Lety u Písku (863 people), and on August 22, the transport from the camp in Hodonín u Kunštátu (768 people) followed. The last transports left on October 19 (from Prague and Brno, 92 people) and on January 28, 1944 (from Prague and Brno, 37 people). In total, the protectorate authorities gradually deported about 4,500 protectorate Roma and Sinti to Auschwitz by mass transports of „gypsies“. More than a hundred other people were deported individually.³³



III. 6: The Abolition of „Gypsiness“. In: *Polední list*. [Afternoon daily.] Prague, March 8, 1943, No. 17, p. 2.

31 For more information about the „Gypsy camp“ in Auschwitz-Birkenau, see e.g. Gedenkbuch. Die Sinti und Roma im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau / Memorial Book. The Gypsies at Auschwitz-Birkenau / Księga Pamięci. Cyganie w obozie koncentracyjnym Auschwitz-Birkenau. Vol. 1, 2. (München/London/New York/Paris. 1993), 1674 pp.; Sławomir Kapralski/Maria Martyniak/Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, Voices of Memory 7. Roma in Auschwitz. (Oświęcim, 2011), 163 pp.

32 Nečas, Roma yesterday and today, pp. 76–78; Ibidem, Z Brna do Auschwitz-Birkenau. První transport moravských Romů do koncentračního tábora Auschwitz-Birkenau [From Brno to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The first transport of Moravian Roma to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp]. (Brno, 2000), 60 pp.; Ibidem, Roma in Moravia and Silesia, pp. 294–297.

33 Ctibor Nečas, Nad osudem českých a slovenských Cikánů 1939-1945. [On the Fate of the Czech and Slovak Gypsies in 1939–1945]. (Brno, 1981), pp. 62–63.



Ill. 7: Roma from the village of Bohusoudov (Jihlava district) gathered for their deportation to the Auschwitz II.-Birkenau concentration camp, 1943.

Escape, survival and resistance

After the deportation of the majority of the Roma population, an unspecified number of Roma remained in the Protectorate. A group of about two hundred of them, who were released during the assembly of transports with the permission of the criminal police, was probably to undergo forced sterilization in the future.³⁴

Those who were not identified as „gypsies and gypsy half-breeds“ in the census of „gypsies“ had the best chance of survival, since they did not even get into the process of „final solution“. This is how for example Eduard Holomek managed to survive. In 1941, with the help of a friend, he got on the list of young men who were sent to the Reich. During the war, he worked in an ammunition factory near Vienna.³⁵

Other Roma hid (eg with relatives, friends or in the woods), some fled to Slovakia.³⁶ But a successful escape from a camp did not mean safety yet. Larger groups (eg families)

³⁴ Nečas, *Czechoslovak Roma 1938–1945*, p. 73.

³⁵ Elina Machálková, *Elina – sága rodu Holomků [Elina – saga of the Holomek family]*. In: Karolína Kozáková, Elina Machálková, *Memoáry romských žen [The memoirs of Roma women]*. (Brno, 2004), pp. 37-38, note 28, p. 55.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 71–73.



moved more slowly, were more conspicuous and had difficulties finding shelter and food. An individual may have had a better chance of escaping, but on the other hand he often had to decide to leave his loved ones behind without knowing if they would ever meet again. The refugees had to hide not only from the security authorities, but also from the majority population. Although there were people who tried to help in various ways, such as providing temporary or permanent shelter, food, etc., not everyone was willing to take risks and help, even less to „gypsies“, stigmatized by prejudice and contempt. The genocidal measures of the authorities were based on the racist attitudes of the society of that time. People commonly agreed with the gradual radicalization aimed at suppressing the rights of various groups of the population and ultimately leading to their extermination. Moreover, anti-Gypsyism, similar to anti-Semitism, was constantly fueled by propaganda in the press and radio during the Nazi regime.

Zilli Schmidt (born Reichmann in 1924) a German Sinteza, who fled the „gypsy camp“ in Lety u Písku in November 1942, had a painful fate. After a few days on the run in the Protectorate, she was arrested again and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in March 1943. Later that year, she also met her three-year-old daughter, parents and other relatives there, who in the meantime had also been imprisoned at the „gypsy camp“ in Lety u Písku, subsequently also in Hodonín u Kunštátu before being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. While Zilli was taken to the Ravensbrück concentration camp on August 2, 1944, the rest of the family was sent to the gas chamber that day. She later escaped from a branch camp of Ravensbrück and hid in Berlin, where she was liberated. After the war, she settled in Germany, where she still lives and testifies to her persecution.³⁷

Some individuals also took an active part in the anti-Nazi resistance. E.g. Josef Serinek (1900–1974), who in the autumn of 1942 successfully fled the „gypsy camp“ Lety u Písku, went on to form a guerrilla unit named „Čapajev“, often though called „Černý“ („Black“) and became famous in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands.³⁸ Another fighter was Antonín Murka (1923–1989), who joined the anti-Nazi resistance in his native region of Valašsko (Wallachia) in Moravia after escaping from the „gypsy camp“ Hodonín u Kunštátu.³⁹

37 Zilli Schmidt, Gott hat mit mir etwas vorgehabt! Erinnerungen einer deutschen Sinteza [God had more plans for me! Memories of a German Sinteza]. (Berlin, 2020), 173 pp., https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/wp-content/uploads/Zilli-Schmidt_Gott-hat-mit-mir-etwas-vorgehabt_Web-PDF_Einzelseiten.pdf. Accessed: 17 May 2020.

38 Josef Serinek, Jan Tesař, Česká cikánská rapsodie [Czech gypsy rhapsody]. Volume I–III. (Praha, 2016), 502 pp., 635 pp., 208 pp.

39 Ctibor Nečas (ed.), Nemůžeme zapomenout. Našti bisteras. Nucená táborová koncentrace ve vyprávění romských pamětníků [We Can't Forget. Našti bisteras. The Forced Camp Concentration in the Narration of Roma Witnesses]. (Brno, 1994), pp. 180–186; Ibidem, Some Roma miniatures, pp. 100–102.



Conclusion

The Nazi persecution of people labelled as „gypsies and gypsy half-breeds“ in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia affected most of the Roma and Sinti living there. The Protectorate government gradually adopted all the „anti-Gypsy“ regulations that were implemented in Nazi Germany during the 1930s, starting with forced settlement and constant police surveillance. From mid-1942, the Nazis pursued an openly racist policy. In the summer of 1942, a decree was adopted to combat the so-called „gypsy plague“ and an census of „Gypsies and Gypsy half-breeds“ was carried out, that would later form the basis for the imprisonment of about a third of those identified as „Gypsies“ in the newly created „gypsy camps“ in Lety u Písku and Hodonín u Kunštátu. During their existence from the summer of 1942 to the summer of 1943, about 2,700 men, women and children were imprisoned there. Almost 540 of them died there due to catastrophic living conditions.

With the decree of SS leader Heinrich Himmler from December 1942, that ordered imprisonment in the concentration and extermination camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau for all „gypsies and gypsy half-breeds“ from the Reich and its subordinate territories, all other plans for the future of the Roma and Sinti discussed by the Nazis were rendered invalid. Thus, another 4,500 protectorate „gypsies and gypsy half-breeds“ were deported in March 1943 in several mass transports to the „gypsy camp“ in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where most of them perished. All of them together make up the more than 5,000 Roma, Sinti and other people labelled as „gypsies“ from the territory of today's Czech Republic, who were murdered as part of the Nazi persecution of „gypsies“.

Local authorities carried out the persecution of „gypsies“ in the Protectorate, but still this persecution was an essential part of the „final solution to the gypsy question“ ruled by the Reich. A large number of Czech citizens, who held positions at various levels, took part in it in varying intensity and extent. The Czech majority society, which has deep-rooted prejudices and stereotypes against the Roma and Sinti, thus bore its share of responsibility for the crimes committed.



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