

# Hungarian Jews Wait in a Clearing before being led to the Gas Chambers at Auschwitz II-Birkenau (May/June, 1944)

## Abstract

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After the Germans occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944, the newly installed collaborationist regime demanded that the country's Jews be rounded up and handed over. In mid-May 1944, the Hungarian authorities, working in close collaboration with Adolf Eichmann and the German Security Police [*Sicherheitspolizei*] began systematic deportations. Over the next two months, approximately 440,000 Hungarian Jews were deported. Most were sent to Auschwitz, where the majority were killed shortly after their arrival.

This photograph shows a group of women and children from Subcarpathian Rus, which became part of Hungary after the signing of the Munich Agreement. Having been deemed "unfit for work," they wait in a clearing near a grove of trees before being led to the gas chambers at Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

The photograph comes from the "Auschwitz Album," a collection of 193 photographs documenting the arrival and selection of one or more transports of Hungarian Jews in May/June 1944. The photographs were taken by SS *Hauptscharführer* Bernhardt Walter and his assistant, *Unterscharführer* Ernst Hofmann. (The two worked as photographers for the camp's Identification Service [*Erkennungsdienst*] and were responsible for photographing and fingerprinting the prisoners who were selected for work.) Members of the SS put Walter and Hofmann's photos of the Hungarian Jews into an album that bore the innocuous sounding title "Resettlement of the Jews of Hungary."

Eighteen-year-old Lili Jacob (1926-1999) and her family were among those Hungarian Jews from Subcarpathian Rus who were deported to Auschwitz. From there, Jacob was sent to the Dora-Mittelbau camp, where she worked as a forced laborer until her liberation in April 1945. It was there that she found the album in an abandoned SS barracks. She recognized herself and various family members (e.g., two of her brothers and her grandparents) in certain photographs. She was eventually called as a witness in the First Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963-65), where she presented the album to the court. In 1980, Lili Jacob donated the "Auschwitz Album" to Yad Vashem.

## Source

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Source: Jewish women and children from Hungary at the assembly point in Auschwitz -II- Birkenau concentration camp. Photo: Bernhardt Walter, Ernst Hofmann.

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