

Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die? The High Holy days in Auschwitz 1944

This paper focuses on a group of 2,000 young boys from predominantly very religious backgrounds between the ages of 12-16 who arrived in the Auschwitz quarantine camp in the summer and fall of 1944 from Poland and Hungary and their experiences during a period of weeks covering September and October 1944. It examines, from a multitude of perspectives, the machinations of two selections which result in their survival or selection for death at Auschwitz during the holiest part of the Jewish year, including how various privileged prisoners intervened to assist some of these boys in survival. This project interrogates how memories of these events have been preserved, mythologized, and understood, especially within the most religious Jewish communities

This paper seeks to posit a fundamental question about survival and the Holocaust. Primo Levi wrote in *The Drowned and the Saved*, “In short, they were saved by luck, and there is not much sense in trying to find something common to all their destinies, beyond perhaps their initial good health.”¹ This notion that luck was the major factor of survival is echoed by many survivors, especially survivors of this particular event. Through a microhistorical examination of these two specific selections and the short period before and after when privileged prisoners intervened to change the outcome of the selections, this paper examines the role of pre-war relationships and socio-economic status that influence survival.

¹ Primo Levi. *The Drowned and the Saved*. (R. Rosenthal, Trans.) . New York , NY : Vintage, 1989. P. 49-50