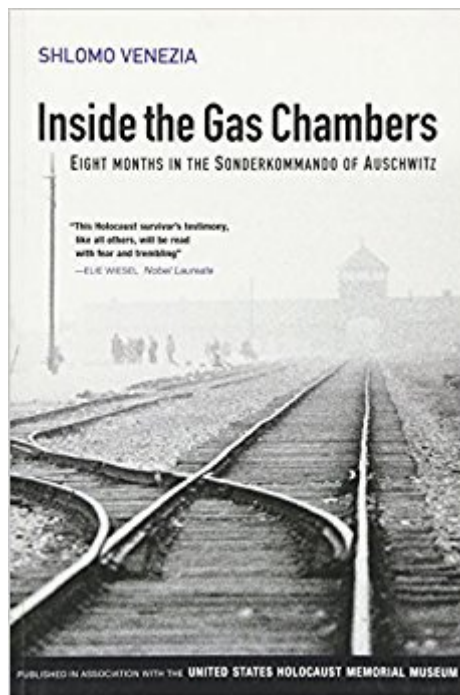




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# Inside The Gas Chambers: Eight Months In The Sonderkommando Of Auschwitz



## Synopsis

This is a unique, eye-witness account of everyday life right at the heart of the Nazi extermination machine. Slomo Venezia was born into a poor Jewish-Italian community living in Thessaloniki, Greece. At first, the occupying Italians protected his family; but when the Germans invaded, the Venezias were deported to Auschwitz. His mother and sisters disappeared on arrival, and he learned, at first with disbelief, that they had almost certainly been gassed. Given the chance to earn a little extra bread, he agreed to become a 'Sonderkommando', without realising what this entailed. He soon found himself a member of the 'special unit' responsible for removing the corpses from the gas chambers and burning their bodies. Dispassionately, he details the grim round of daily tasks, evokes the terror inspired by the man in charge of the crematoria, 'Angel of Death' Otto Moll, and recounts the attempts made by some of the prisoners to escape, including the revolt of October 1944. It is usual to imagine that none of those who went into the gas chambers at Auschwitz ever emerged to tell their tale - but, as a member of a 'Sonderkommando', Shlomo Venezia was given this horrific privilege. He knew that, having witnessed the unspeakable, he in turn would probably be eliminated by the SS in case he ever told his tale. He survived: this is his story. Published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A unique participant's account of everyday death and life,' the jacket says. That sense of existential inversion is what comes across most strongly in this book, more strongly than even Levi's greatest work can convey." The Australian "Venezia reports soberly and seemingly without emotion

- and yet the book becomes breathtaking in its forcefulness."Holocaust and Genocide Studies

"Venezia's experiences during the war is at once both fascinating and disturbing. His description of prewar Salonika and his complicated ethnic/national background certainly help illuminate our picture of the multicultural societies of Europe that the Second World War nearly completely eliminated. He also captures the violence and brutality of Auschwitz in a very readable fashion. His descriptions of the inhumanity of the camp will remain with me for quite some time."H-Net: Humanities and Social Science Reviews Online "A deeply sincere, unadorned description of Venezia's journey through hell ... There are few, if any, better descriptions of the impact of massive psychic trauma on the human soul." Jewish Book World "Venezia comes across as a very reliable witness. His language is clear, and he certainly does not idealize the members of the 'Sonderkommando' or his own role in the extermination process. It is a detailed and heartbreaking story, told in very restrained language."Journal of Contemporary History "A harrowingly matter-of-fact account."Boston Globe"Most Sonderkommando members were systematically killed by the SS. But fate allowed Shlomo Venezia to survive, and the horrific privilege to bear witness."History Wire "Shlomo Venezia's unnervingly dispassionate personal record demands to be heard. Interviewer Beatrice Prasquier's brusque questions, answered with painful truthfulness, bring home the lifelong scars this Greek Italian Jew must carry from the ever-present memories of the numberless innocents he helped lead to their grotesque slaughter." Morning Star "What is remarkable is on the one hand the lack of anger, the simple language dealing with events that are unforgettable and beyond reality, and on the other hand the fact of Venezia's daily life ever since ... He has never, in his mind, lived outside the camp." Atsmi Uvsari "I read many accounts of former deportees, and each time they take me back to life in the camp. But the story told by Shlomo Venezia is especially overwhelming because it is the only complete eye-witness account that we have from a survivor of the Sonderkommandos." Simone Veil "This holocaust survivor's testimony, like all others, will be read with fear and trembling." Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate

This is a unique, eye-witness account of everyday life right at the heart of the Nazi extermination machine. Slomo Venezia was born into a poor Jewish-Italian community living in Thessaloniki, Greece. At first, the occupying Italians protected his family; but when the Germans invaded, the Venezias were deported to Auschwitz. His mother and sisters disappeared on arrival, and he learned, at first with disbelief, that they had almost certainly been gassed. Given the chance to earn a little extra bread, he agreed to become a *Sonderkommando*<sup>TM</sup>, without realising what this entailed. He soon found himself a member of the *special unit*<sup>TM</sup> responsible for removing the

corpses from the gas chambers and burning their bodies. Dispassionately, he details the grim round of daily tasks, evokes the terror inspired by the man in charge of the crematoria, the "Angel of Death" Otto Moll, and recounts the attempts made by some of the prisoners to escape, including the revolt of October 1944. It is usual to imagine that none of those who went into the gas chambers at Auschwitz ever emerged to tell their tale – but, as a "Sonderkommando", Shlomo Venezia was given this horrific privilege. He knew that, having witnessed the unspeakable, he in turn would probably be eliminated by the SS in case he ever told his tale. He survived: this is his story.

This book is the collected memories of Shlomo Venezia of his time in the crematorium sonderkommando (work unit) at Auschwitz-Birkenau. At first I found the question and answer format of the text somewhat distancing as the book records the conversations he had with an interviewer in 2006. Furthermore, the fact that his thoughts were put on paper in that year gave his memories a somewhat fragmentary feel. However, as I progressed through the book, those points receded and his deeply disturbing experiences came more to life. Sadly, Shlomo Venezia died in October of 2012, at the age of 88. NOTE: If you can only read one testimonial of a crematoria sonderkommando worker, I would recommend that you read "Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers" by Filip Muller. He wrote this just a couple of years after he got out of the camp, and has a more coherent and direct feeling.

I found this book with more of an insight into what went on inside the gas chambers themselves and the men who worked in them. I also realized that some people's lives can mean no more than a fly on a wall ready to be done away with little or no thought at all. It's strange that a people can be killed in mass production shops like making a car on an assembly line. The Nazis found that by using the SonderKommando that the operation could be done by the same people they were going to eventually kill so it would all be kept quiet. It's hard to comprehend how a human being could do such things. But like the book says "you can get used to anything over time" And that is the scariest part of all. They did.

Difficult book to read because of the content, but a book worth reading. The account is very straightforward, no embellishments. This first hand account makes no excuses for his actions. It is a sad tale and a time to remember.

Excellent view of the horrors of the Holocaust. Not for the faint of heart. It's graphic and gruesome.

An interesting book to add to my library. Not the most engaging Auschwitz book I have read, but certainly easier to read than Filip Muller's book for example which is a much more heart-rending and emotional read. However, I would still recommend reading it, the style is more objective and matter of fact and hence easier to read without becoming upset. This may be a good introduction to Auschwitz books for the reader.

Shlomo saw so many atrocities but showed how luck and fate would save him and others he mentions in his well-written auto biography.

Personal accounts from survivors of this tragedy reinforce just how terribly mistreated an innocent peoples.

Great book

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