

## **PRIMO LEVI MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION, 1946-1947 2016.78.1**

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives  
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### **Descriptive summary**

Title: Primo Levi manuscript collection

Dates: 1946-1947

Accession number: 2016.78.1

Creator: Levi, Primo.

Extent: 10 folders

Repository: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW,  
Washington, DC 20024-2126

Abstract: Collection consists of the typescript text of a working draft of Primo Levi's original manuscript *Se questo è un Uomo* [If This Is a Man], which recounted his experiences as a prisoner at Auschwitz, and was later published as *Survival in Auschwitz*. Contains handwritten corrections and additions in red pencil; and includes 10 of the 17 chapters that were eventually included in the final publication.

Languages: Italian.

### **Administrative Information**

Access: Collection is open for use, under supervision, but is stored offsite. Please contact the Reference Desk more than seven days prior to visit in order to request access.

Reproduction and use: Collection is available for use. Material may be protected by copyright. Please contact reference staff for further information.

Preferred citation: (Identification of item), Primo Levi manuscript collection (2016.78.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Acquisition information: Gift of Eva Yona Deykin and Manuela Yona Paul, 2016.

Custodial history: This working draft of *Se questo è un Uomo* was sent by Primo Levi in 1947 to his cousin, Anna Foa Yona (the donors' mother), in Boston. She had fled Italy with her husband and daughters to the US in 1940. Yona translated a few chapters in order to assist Levi in finding an American publisher, but they were not successful. The completed book was first published in Italy in 1947, and it was later fully translated into English and published as "Survival in Auschwitz" in 1959. Yona kept the typescript draft of this text, which Levi had sent to her, and after her death, it became the property of her daughters, Eva Deykin and Manuela Paul.

Accruals: Accruals may have been received since this collection was first processed, see archives catalog at [collections.ushmm.org](http://collections.ushmm.org) for further information.

Processing history: Processed by Kyra Schuster and Brad Bauer, May 2016.

### **Biographical note**

Primo Levi was born on 31 July, 1919 in Turin, Italy, son of Cesare Levi and Ester Luzzati Levi. His sister Anna Maria was born in 1921. As a child, Levi had a basic Jewish religious education, and celebrated his bar mitzvah at the age of 13. He became passionate about chemistry at age 14, focusing his high school studies on science. In October 1937, he enrolled as a chemistry student at the University of Turin, graduating cum laude in July 1941. His diploma noted that he was "of the Jewish race." In July 1942, Levi moved to Milan to work at Wander, a Swiss drug company, and then in November he and his friends made contact with members of an anti-Fascist organization and joined the clandestine Action Party. The following summer, after the fall of the Fascist government and the German invasion of Italy, Levi quit his job and joined a partisan group in Valle d'Aosta in the Alps. On December 13, 1943, Levi was arrested near Brusson with others and taken to the Fossoli transit camp. In February 1944, the Germans took over operation of Fossoli, and Levi was sent on transport to Auschwitz, with approximately 650 others prisoners. Only 95 men and 29 women from this transport were selected for labor, all the others were immediately killed in the gas chambers. Levi was tattooed with prisoner number 174517 and sent to Monowitz. During that time, he met and befriended Lorenzo Perrone who was working as a mason for an Italian company that had moved to Auschwitz. Perrone helped Levi by providing him with extra rations, and other goods. Levi credited Perrone with saving his life, and Perrone was recognized in 1998 as Righteous Among the Nations for his actions. Levi was sick with scarlet fever when the Germans evacuated the camp as the Russian army advanced on the camp in early 1945, and he was liberated by the Russian Army on January 27, 1945. Levi lived in a Soviet transit camp in Katowice, Poland for several months and then after some time in a camp in Belarus, he and other Italian former prisoners were repatriated back to Italy. He returned to his family home in October 1945. In 1946, after beginning work as a chemist at a paint factory outside of Turin, Levi began writing what would become "If This Is a Man," which was titled "Survival in Auschwitz" in later English editions. The book was published in Italy in 1947, and he had a continued career as both a chemist and award winning author of multiple novels, short stories, and autobiographical works. Levi married Lucia Morpurgo in 1946, they had two children Lisa and Renzo. Levi died in Turin on April 11, 1987, and his death was ruled suicide by Italian authorities.

### **Scope and content of collection**

The Primo Levi manuscript collection consists of the typescript text of a working draft of Primo Levi's original manuscript *Se questo è un Uomo* [If This Is a Man], which recounted his experiences as a prisoner at Auschwitz, and was later published as *Survival in Auschwitz*. Contains handwritten

corrections and additions in red pencil; and includes 10 of the 17 chapters that were eventually included in the final publication. Many of the texts conclude with the date on which they were written, along with Levi's name.

### **System of arrangement**

The texts in this collection are arranged by chapter, in the sequence in which they appeared in the published version of *Se questo è un Uomo*.

### **Indexing terms**

Auschwitz (Concentration camp)  
World War, 1939-1945--Prisoners and prisons, German.  
World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives, Italian.  
Concentration camp inmates--Poland--Oświęcim--Biography.  
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Personal narratives.

## **CONTAINER LIST**

<i>Folder number</i>	<i>Chapter title</i>
1	Il viaggio (4 pages, undated)
2	Sul fondo (7 pages, undated)
3	Ka-be (9 pages, 15-20 June, 1946)
4	Il lavoro (4 pages, undated)
5	Una buona giornata (4 pages, incomplete)
6	Esame di chimica (5 pages, March 1946)
7	Il canto di Ulisse (4 pages, 14 February 1946)
8	Ottobre 1944 (5 pages, 5-8 April 1946)
9	Kraus (3 pages, 25 February 1946)
10	Storia di dieci giorni (14 pages, undated)