

Michal Schuster

# The Dycha Family from the Village of Hrušky

Microhistory of the Nazi Genocide of the Roma  
and Sinti in the Czech Republic

## Abstract

This article presents one of the concrete outcomes of the project “Database of Victims of the National Socialist Persecution of ‘Gypsies’” conducted by the Terezín Initiative Institute in Prague. The case study explored here shows the potential of this detailed, systematic, and local research of individual victims, which documents the genocide of the Roma and Sinti population on the territory of today’s Czech Republic. The Dycha family lived in the agricultural village of Hrušky in South Moravia, where they had a small house, work, and conflict-free relationships with the majority population. After 1939, the ‘anti-Gypsy’ politics of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia struck them. The entire family, including all eight children, were finally transported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in early May 1943. The only survivor was Damián Danihel, the illegitimate son of Estera Dychová. According to documents and testimonies, he was rescued thanks to his Slovak citizenship and the intervention of two local men – the former village mayor and his successor.

This case study of the tragic fate of the Roma<sup>1</sup> from the village of Hrušky in the Břeclav district is one of the specific outcomes of the project “Database of Victims of the National Socialist Persecution of ‘Gypsies’” [Databáze obětí nacistického pronásledování ‘cikánů’], which was conducted by the Terezín Initiative Institute in Prague.<sup>2</sup> This case study aims to contribute to the historical research of the life of Roma and Sinti in the territory of today’s Czech Republic during the first half of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the period 1939 to 1945. Focussing on a specific place or family through detailed, systematic, and local research can help to change perspectives and enrich research based on documents created by authorities and state institutions. The aim of my research was also to find out how the local inclusion and recognition of the Roma affected and mitigated, at least for some time, their exclusion, categorisation, and perhaps – temporarily – their deportation to a concentration camp.

The Nazi genocide of Roma and Sinti during the Second World War has sometimes been referred to as the ‘unknown’ or ‘forgotten holocaust’. Despite the visible development of research, education, and commemoration of this historical event

1 In this article, I use the terms Roma and Sinti when I speak of these ethnic communities in general, while using the term ‘Gypsy/ies’ to express the contemporary context or contemporary designation.

2 For more information on the project, see the report by Aletta Beck in this issue as well as Michal Schuster, Projekt Databáze romských obětí holocaustu v České republice [Database of the Roma Victims of the Holocaust in the Czech Republic], in: *Romani Džaniben* 1 (2018), 187-192, and <http://www.terezinstudies.cz/projects/roma-database.html> (13 August 2021).

after 1989, the topic unfortunately has still not become an integrated part of the current historical narrative in the Czech Republic, nor, considering the current state of affairs, gained the necessary awareness among non-Roma society.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted, however, that Czech historiography has progressed significantly over the past three decades with regard to research on the Nazi genocide of Roma and Sinti and its post-war aftermath. In addition to historians who began their research before 1989,<sup>4</sup> other researchers have come up with new questions and answers, methodological approaches, and trends. A number of new aspects appear in this newer research, which relate, among other things, to the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic and its political and social approach to Roma and Sinti; Czech participation in their marginalisation and later concentration; Czech responsibility or complicity in their genocide; the role of the protectorate 'Gypsy camps' in Lety u Písku and Hodonín u Kunštátu; post-war remembrance of this tragic history; and more.<sup>5</sup>

- 3 Ctibor Nečas, Druhý aneb Neznámý holocaust [The Second or Unknown Holocaust], in: Spisy Právnické fakulty v Brně (řada teoretická) 160 (1995), 47-51; Fenomén holocaust. The Holocaust Phenomenon, Prague 2000; Jana Horváthová (ed.), Le romengro murdaripen andro dujto baro mariben. Genocida Romů v době druhé světové války [Genocide of the Roma during the Second World War], Prague 2003; Helena Sadílková/Michal Schuster/Milada Závodská, Holocaust Romů jako "neznámý" nebo "zapomenutý" [The Holocaust of Roma as "Unknown" or "Forgotten"], in: Dějiny a současnost 9 (2015), 30-34. On terms referring to the Nazi genocide of the Roma and Sinti, see: Renáta Berkyová, Obětujeme Romy ve prospěch vědy? Kritická reflexe pojmů "porajmos" a "holocaust" v diskurzu (nejen) romistické historiografie [Are We Sacrificing the Roma for Scholarship? Critical Reflection of the Terms "Porajmos" and "Holocaust" in the Discourse of (Not Only) Romistic Historiography], in: Bulletin Muzea romské kultury 26 (2017), 38-57.
- 4 See for example: Ctibor Nečas, Nad osudem českých a slovenských Cikánů v letech 1939–1945 [On the Fate of the Czech and Slovak Gypsies in 1939–1945], Brno 1981; Idem, Andr' oda taboris. Věžňové protektorátních cikánských táborů 1942–1943 [In the Camp. Prisoners of the Protectorate Gypsy Camps, 1942–1943], Brno 1987; Idem, Českoslovenští Romové v letech 1938–1945 [Czechoslovak Roma in 1938–1945], Brno 1994; Idem, Andr' oda taboris. Tragédie cikánských táborů v letech a v Hodoníně [In the Camp. The Tragedy of the Protectorate Gypsy Camps in Lety and Hodonín], Brno 1995; Idem, Holocaust českých Romů [The Holocaust of the Czech Roma], Prague 1999; Vlasta Kladiřová, Konečná stanice Auschwitz-Birkenau [The Final Station Auschwitz-Birkenau], Olomouc 1994; Milena Hübschmannová, "Po Židech cigáni". Svědectví Romů ze Slovenska 1939–1945. I. díl, (1939 – srpen 1944) ["Gypsies after Jews". Testimonies of Roma from Slovakia 1939–1945], Prague 2005.
- 5 See for example: Markus Pape, A nikdo vám nebude věřit. Dokument o koncentračním táboře Lety u Písku [And Nobody Will Believe You. Documentary about the Concentration Camp Lety u Písku], Prague 1997; Petr Lhotka, Snaha Romů o získání protektorátní státní příslušnosti [Roma Efforts to Acquire Protectorate Citizenship], in: Bulletin Muzea romské kultury 6 (1997), 39-40; Jana Horváthová, Výzkum pamětníků – seniorů z historických skupin českých a moravských Romů a německých Sintů [Research of Witnesses. Seniors from the Historical Groups of Czech and Moravian Roma and German Sinti], in: Bulletin Muzea romské kultury 13 (2004), 27-30; Michal Schuster, Proces s Blažejem Dydem na základě materiálů Mimořádného lidového soudu v Brně roku 1947 [The Trial of Blažej Dydy on the Basis of Materials from the Extraordinary People's Court in Brno in 1947], in: Romano Džaniben 1 (2013), 73-101; Milada Závodská/Lada Viková, Dokumentace genocidy Romů za 2. světové války v Československu – nálezová zpráva: diskontinuita a kontinuita odhalování historie Romů po roce 1946 [Documentation of the Genocide of the Roma during the Second World War in Czechoslovakia. Findings Report: Discontinuity and Continuity in Revealing the History of the Roma after 1946], in: Romano Džaniben 23 (2016), 107-124; Jiří Smlsal, Holocaust Romů v retribučním soudnictví [Holocaust of the Roma in Retributive Justice], in: Romano Džaniben 1 (2018), 93-120; Pavel Baloun, "Cikáni, metla venkova!" Tvorba a uplatňování proticikánských opatření v meziválečném Československu, za druhé republiky a v počáteční fázi Protektorátu Čechy a Morava (1918–1941) ["The Gypsy Scourge!" Creation and Implementation of Anti-Gypsy Measures in Interwar Czechoslovakia, in the Second Republic, and in the Initial Phase of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1918–1941)], (PhD Thesis) Prague 2020; Renáta Berkyová, Přeživší tzv. cikánského tábora v Letech u Písku v kontextu žádostí o odškodnění dle zákona 255/1946 [Survivors from the So-Called Gypsy Camp in Lety u Písku in the Context of Compensation Claims According to the Czechoslovak Law no. 255/1946], (MA Thesis) Prague 2020.

## Sources, Literature, and Methodology

When I started my research in the State District Archive of Břeclav in Mikulov in 2018, my main aim was to obtain biographical data on Roma and Sinti from the region of South Moravia, which was divided between Germany and Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1938. As a result of the Munich Agreement, this region belonged partly to Germany and partly to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia during the Second World War. During my systematic research of the archival collections of the local gendarmerie stations, I discovered fragmentary information about the Dycha family from the village of Hrušky.

It was mainly the historian Ctibor Nečas who documented the Nazi persecution of Roma and Sinti in the territory of today's Czech Republic from the early 1970s onwards. His monographs and articles, based on extensive heuristics, are fundamental and unsurpassed works for an understanding of this topic and thus provide an opportunity to develop further research. Along with publishing lists of prisoners of the 'Gypsy camps' in Lety u Písku, Hodonín u Kunštátu, and Auschwitz-Birkenau,<sup>6</sup> he researched the fates of particular individuals, families, and local communities, especially from Moravia.<sup>7</sup> Other Czech researchers also dealt with the documentation of Roma victims after 1989.<sup>8</sup>

This previous research was based mainly on classical historical methods, meaning the analysis of written materials of official provenance collected through archival research. It used sources from the regional and central level of state administration and thus described the persecution and genocide of Roma and Sinti mainly on the basis of measures taken by various bodies and institutions. My case study builds on

- 6 See for example: Nečas, Věžňové; Idem, Pamětní seznam – 1: jména a údaje o nebožácích, kteří byli násilně koncentrováni v tzv. cikánském táboře I (Lety, 1942–1943) [Commemorative List – 1. Names and Data of the Miserable Ones Who Were Forcibly Concentrated in the So-Called Gypsy Camp I (Lety, 1942–1943)], Nymburk 2012; Idem, Pamětní seznam. II, Hodonín [Commemorative List. II, Hodonín], Prague 2014; Idem, Aušvicate hi kher báro. Čeští vězňové cikánského tábora v Osvětimi II-Brzezince [Czech Prisoners of the Gypsy Concentration Camp in Auschwitz II-Birkenau], Brno 1992; Idem, 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 Camp], Brno 2000.
- 7 See for example: Ctibor Nečas, Cikáni jihovýchodní Moravy v letech 1939–1945 [The Gypsies of Southeast Moravia in the Years 1939–1945], in: Osvobození a nové osídlení jižní Moravy 1945 (1975), 159–166; Idem, Cikáni politického okresu Zlín (1939–1945) [The Gypsies of the Zlín Political District (1939–1945)], in: Zprávy Oblastního muzea v Gottwaldově 3–4 (1975), 17–23; Idem, Cikáni na Uherskohradištsku v období nacistické okupace [Gypsies in the Uherské Hradiště Region during the Nazi Occupation], in: Slovácko 16–17 (1974–1975), 42–50; Idem, Z minulosti luhačovických Cikánů [From the Past of the Gypsies of Luhačovice], in: Slovácko 18–19 (1976–1977), 75–96; Idem, Cikáni na Hodonínsku [Gypsies in the Hodonín Region], in: Malovaný kraj 13 (1977), 14–15; Idem, Usedlí strážniční Cikáni [The Settled Gypsies in Strážnice], in: Jižní Morava 19 (1983), 63–78; Idem, Genealogie jednoho cikánského rodu [Genealogy of a Gypsy Family], in: Brno v minulosti a dnes 10 (1989), 131–135; Idem, Původní cikánská populace Brna a její vyhlazení v letech 1939–1945 [The Original Gypsy Population of Brno and its Extermination in the Years 1939–1945], in: Forum Brunense 2 (1989), 99–108; Dušan Holý/Ctibor Nečas, Žalující píseň. O osudu Romů v nacistických koncentračních táborech [Lament. On the Fate of the Roma in Nazi Concentration Camps], Strážnice/Brno 1993; Ctibor Nečas, Chmurný epilog životního příběhu Ludvíka Murky [The Gloomy Epilogue of Ludvík Murka's Life Story], in: Bulletin Muzea romské kultury 14 (2005), 91–92.
- 8 Jiří Pavelčík, "Cikánská" osada Okluček v Uherském Brodě-Havřicích [The "Gypsy" Settlement Okluček in Uherský Brod-Havřice], in: Bulletin Muzea romské kultury 10 (2001), 55–59; David Valúšek, Jaroslav Herák. Tragický osud luhačovického Roma [Jaroslav Herák. The Tragic Fate of the Roma of Luhačovice], in: Tomáš Dvořák/Radomír Vlček/Libor Vykoupil, Milý Bore ... profesoru Ctiboru Nečasovi k jeho sedmdesátým narozeninám věnují přátelé, kolegové a žáci [Dear Bor ... Dedicated to Professor Ctibor Nečas on his Seventieth Birthday by Friends, Colleagues, and Students] 2003, 391–396; Jana Horváthová, Tři ženy – tři osudy [Three Women – Three Fates], in: Bulletin Muzea romské kultury 15 (2006), 154–157; Jan Důbravčík, Osud členů rodiny moravských Romů Heráků z obce Žeranovice za 2. světové války [The Fate of the Members of the Moravian Roma Family Herák from the Municipality of Žeranovice during the Second World War], in: Holešovsko 11 (2010), 10–11.

these works, but in my methodological approach I tried to combine this classical historical research with methods of oral history, meaning the use of witness narratives as additional source material.

### The Roma of Hrušky before the Second World War

The small village Hrušky, located in the Břeclav district in the south of Moravia,<sup>9</sup> was a predominantly agricultural village, consisting of 268 houses and 1,505 mostly Czech inhabitants in 1900.<sup>10</sup> The first Roma appeared in the village sometime in the second half of the nineteenth century. These were individuals who came to the Břeclav manor from the nearby Hodonín and Strážnice manors. They made their living as blacksmiths, workers, and day labourers on the manor farm in Hrušky, where they also lived. In 1878, the “hut on the lawn” was referred to as the dwelling of local ‘Gypsies’.<sup>11</sup> Further information is provided in a list of ‘Gypsies’ in the district of Hodonín from 1909, which formed part of the overview of ‘Gypsies’ living in Moravia created by the gendarmerie for their provincial headquarters in Brno. Three people were recorded in Hrušky: the widow and day labourer Julia Kýrová née Danihelová (born 1852 in Čáry, Slovakia, died 1928), her deaf-mute brother, the blacksmith Marek Malík (born 1858 in Hrušky, died 1928), and her son, the blacksmith Martin Kýr (born 1879 in Hrušky, died 1916). Both men also worked as day labourers.<sup>12</sup>

The local chronicler Jan Mráz documented the fate of these three people in the manuscript for his village chronicle, which he apparently wrote between 1959 and 1965, but which is unfortunately unpreserved. On three pages, he described the fate of the local Roma in a very interesting way. At the beginning of his text he wrote:

“Our village was the only village in which the Gypsies lived and enjoyed civil rights, because they were not nomadic; they lived here from time immemorial and earned their living honestly. Although the inhabitants of our community were often mocked by citizens from other municipalities because of this Gypsy family, we were used to it and we liked it because they were doing the hardest work for local peasants.”<sup>13</sup>

This example is typical of Mráz’s narrative about the Roma from Hrušky. On the one hand, he emphasises a relatively harmonious coexistence in his text, while on the other describing this positive aspect as an exception that did not correspond to common majority images and stereotypes about Roma during those times.

The chronicler Mráz also described the dwelling of the Roma family at the turn of the twentieth century: “The Gypsies lived on the outskirts of the village at today’s railway station in a clay hut built like a dugout.”<sup>14</sup> The original simple hut with a chimney was captured in a unique photograph, which was taken in 1897 and depicts

9 Hrušky. Občané své obci [Hrušky. Citizens of Their Village], Podivín 1998, 32.

10 Ibid.; Miroslav Blažej/Svatava Bradávková/Bohuslav Čapka et al., 650 let obce Hrušky [650 Years of the Village of Hrušky], Brno 2018, 25.

11 Moravský zemský archiv [Moravian Provincial Archive] (MZA), Sbirka matrik [Collection of Registry Records], Matrika oddaných Moravská Nová Ves, obec Hrušky (1848–1928) [Marriage Registry of Moravská Nová Ves, Village of Hrušky (1848–1928)], signature (sig.) 3025, folio (fol.) 86; Diecézní archiv Biskupství brněnského [Diocesan Archives of the Bishopric of Brno] (DABB), Rajhrad, Farní úřad Moravská Nová Ves [Parish Office Moravská Nová Ves] (FÚMNV), inv. n. 12, book 12, 49.

12 MZA, B 14, Moravské místodržitelství [Moravian Governorate], ml., file 7908, sig. 124, fol. 407.

13 Vlastivědný kroužek v Hruškách [Hrušky Local Historical Club] (VKH), Jan Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky [Notes for a Chronicle of the Village of Hrušky].

14 VKH, Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky.



A group of people in front of the house of the Dycha family in Hrušky  
(Vlastivědný kroužek Hrušky [Hrušky Local Historical Club]).

Hrušky from the railway embankment.<sup>15</sup> The location of the dwelling was not accidental – the Roma collected coal that fell on the rails from passing locomotives and used it for their blacksmith work, which was their main livelihood alongside their day labour work.<sup>16</sup> Later, Martin Kýr built a brick house on the same location, which was assigned the number 290 and described as a house “for which no cottager or small farmer would be ashamed of”.<sup>17</sup>

Another relative from the Kýr family, Josef Dycha (born 1877 in Tvarožná Lhota, Hodonín district),<sup>18</sup> later also settled in Hrušky and in 1910 obtained the right of residence there, which, according to archival documents, was no simple matter. The right of residence or home affiliation was a legal institution of “affiliation to the municipality”, which was in place in the Bohemian Lands until 1949. It meant the right to settle in the municipality as well as access to poor relief or other social services. Municipalities often only granted this right to the Roma population with reluctance and concern.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, the sources only indicate the negotiations between Dycha and the municipal representatives on the right of residence (for example, in January 1910 the municipal committee rejected his request because it considered him a “nomadic Gypsy”). According to Mráz, the municipal councillors even “chased” him, but Dycha did not give up and, “thanks to his good approach to work, he gained favour after some time and stayed permanently in Hrušky”. The process of acquiring the right of residence implies that Dycha was perceived as a proper citizen,

15 VKH, digital copy of the photograph.

16 In 1841, the track section of the railway line on the routes Břeclav–Přerov and Vienna–Břeclav–Olomouc, which led through the Hrušky area, was put into operation. See e.g.: 160 let Severní dráhy císaře Ferdinanda (1841–2001) [160 Years of the Northern Railway of Emperor Ferdinand (1841–2001)], Ostrava 2001.

17 VKH, Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky.

18 MZA, Sbirka matrik [Collection of Registry Records], Matrika oddaných Kněždub, obec Tvarožná Lhota (1867–1936) [Marriage Registry of Kněždub, Village of Tvarožná Lhota], sig. 5430, fol. 36.

19 See e.g.: Ctibor Nečas, Spor o svatobořické Cikány [The Dispute over the Gypsies of Svatobořice], in: Jižní Morava 10 (1974), 88–93; Idem, Romská osada v Luhačovicích [The Roma Settlement in Luhačovice], in: Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity. C, 44 (1997), 186–187.

which could help him and later his family to gain a better position in the municipal community.<sup>20</sup>

Martin Kýr and Josef Dycha had to enlist during the First World War. While Dycha returned from the front, Kýr was wounded and died in 1916 in Jaroslav, Galicia, today Poland, where he is also buried.<sup>21</sup> His name is among those of the sixty soldiers from Hrušky killed in action that are commemorated on a war memorial in front of the local school, which was erected in 1925.<sup>22</sup> It is significant that while Kýr was thus commemorated on a memorial erected in the village seven years after the end of the First World War, the rest of the Dycha family are still not publicly remembered as victims of the Second World War in the village. Despite its seriousness, the topic of the Nazi genocide of Roma and Sinti was not reflected upon by the majority society for several decades after the end of the Second World War. Remembrance, education, and research on the genocide of the Roma and Sinti was very limited until 1989. Even today, this topic is not a natural and accepted part of the majority consciousness and historical narrative.<sup>23</sup>

After the war, Kýr's widow Anna sold the house no. 290, where Josef Dycha had also lived until then, and moved to Strážnice, where she married again.<sup>24</sup> Dycha then built a new house in Na Zahájce behind the wine cellars, again near the railway line. He obtained land for the house free of charge from the municipality on the basis of his application, which again testifies to his civic position.<sup>25</sup>

In 1929, Dycha married Estera Danihelová, who was born in 1902 in the nearby Slovak village of Čáry.<sup>26</sup> Between 1927 and 1942, the two had three sons (Jaroslav, born 1927, Josef, born 1934, and Jan, born 1939) and five daughters (Rozálie, born 1929, Anna, born 1930, Josefa, born 1932, Marie, born 1936, and Helena, born 1942).<sup>27</sup> They also raised Damián Danihel, known in the village as Damián Malík (born 1921 in Čáry), the illegitimate son of Estera.<sup>28</sup>

In the interwar period, the Dycha family were the only Roma inhabitants of the village. Witnesses from the ranks of peers and classmates of the Dycha children recall how exemplary, hardworking and, despite their poverty, how involved in local social life they were. Local memories of the Roma family in Hrušky would require more systematic research and more detailed analysis. However, some conclusions can be drawn from six interviews with witnesses (classmates and friends of Dycha's

20 MZA, Statistický zemský úřad markrabství moravského [Statistical Regional Office of the Margraviate of Moravia], inv. n. 3, box 21, fol. 24r; VKH, Jan Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky; Státní okresní archiv Břeclav se sídlem v Mikulově [State District Archives of Břeclav in Mikulov] (SOKABM), Archiv obce Hrušky [Archives of the Village of Hrušky] (AOH), Protokolární kniha obecního výboru [Protocol Book of the Municipal Committee] (1892–1910), protokol ze 4. 1. 1910 [Protocol from 4 January 1910]; SOKABM, AOH, Matrika nových příslušníků [Register of New Members] (1902–1940), no. 43.

21 Vojenský ústřední archiv v Praze [Military Central Archives in Prague], Kmenový list [Military Service Record], Martin Kýr (born 6 February 1879 in Hrušky); Ibid., Kmenový list [Military Service Record], Josef Dycha (born 31 March 1877 in Tvarožná Lhota).

22 Hrušky. Občané své obci, 46; Jana Šumberová/Jaroslava Rajchmanová/Petr Tichý, Padlí z pomníku [The Fallen from the Monument], Břeclav 2018, 59.

23 Sadílková/Schuster/Závodská, Holocaust Romů jako "neznámý" nebo "zapomenutý", 30–34.

24 DABB, FÚMNV, inv. n. 16, book 16, Kniha ohlášek snoubenců [Book of Fiancées' Announcements] (1921–1925), 52; VKH, Jan Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky.

25 SOKABM, AOH, Protokolární kniha finanční komise [Protocol of the Financial Commission] (1933–1954), Protokol schůze 19. 6. 1934 [Protocol of the Meeting of 19 June 1934], 185; Ibid., Protokolární kniha obecního zastupitelstva [Protocol Book of the Municipal Council] (1922–1938), 190.

26 DABB, FÚMNV, inv. n. 17, book 17, Kniha ohlášek snoubenců [Book of Fiancées' Announcements] (21 May 1925 to 25 December 1933), 106.

27 VKH, Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky; Úřad městyse Moravská Nová Ves, Matrika narozených obce Hrušky [City office of Moravská Nová Ves, Birth Register of the Village of Hrušky].

28 Městský úřad Šaštín-Stráže [Municipal Office Šaštín-Stráže], Matrika narozených [Birth Register].

children) who were aged six to sixteen at the end of the Second World War. As in Mráz's text, there is a clear positive aspect on the one hand, with the Dychas being assessed as problem-free and 'normal', while on the other hand this positive aspect is formulated as an exception, which seems to confirm the stereotypical perception of the Roma as a whole. The language in which the Dychas are described is also a confrontation with this general stereotypical discourse. The narrators emphasise in various ways that the Dychas worked, were honest, and a 'solid' family, wore 'normal' clothes, that the children went to school regularly, and so on. This can be interpreted as a form of translating social reality into the context of a stereotypical discourse in which Roma are expected to be a problem. This is also a conscious contrast to the discourse of Roma criminality, which was and still is dominant in Czech society.<sup>29</sup>

Josef Dycha worked as a blacksmith and, like his wife Estera and her son Damián, as day labourers for local peasants, including the farmer Vojtěch Hřebačka, who was the mayor of the village until 1938. In addition, Dycha performed minor work for the municipality.<sup>30</sup> Sometime at the beginning of the Second World War, Estera Dychová began working as a janitor at the local elementary school.<sup>31</sup> Mráz wrote: "During the Second World War, because of the lack of labour, Estera was given the job of the school janitor, which she performed in an exemplary way with the help of her still small school-attending daughters."<sup>32</sup>

The interwar period brought a fundamental change in the legislative regulation of the 'Gypsy question' in Czechoslovakia. In 1927, the law No. 117/1927 Coll. on 'wandering Gypsies' was passed, which defined 'Gypsies' on the basis of lifestyle. This vague definition sparked significant discrimination against the Roma population as a whole.<sup>33</sup> Although the archival documents do not show that the Roma from Hrušky were considered 'wandering Gypsies' due to their settled life, the law and the resulting measures restricting the movement of 'Gypsies' could fundamentally affect their social ties and contacts with relatives in Moravia and Slovakia.

### The Dycha Family as Victims of the Genocide of Roma and Sinti in the Protectorate

After the establishment of the Protectorate, all 'anti-Gypsy' regulations that had been implemented in Nazi Germany during the 1930s, such as the Regulation on the Prevention of Crime and most importantly the Regulation on Combatting the

29 Interviews held on 5 November 2018 in Hrušky with L. S., J. M., A. L., M. B., J. J., and V. N.

30 SOKABM, AOH, Pokladní deník [Cash Register Book] (1919–1938), 249, 287, 330, 561; VKH, Jan Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky.

31 SOKABM, Národní škola Hrušky [National School Hrušky], (NŠH), inv. n. 409, Jednací protokol [Protocol of Procedure] (1936–1944), reference no. 326/1942.

32 VKH, Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky.

33 For more context on the life of Roma and Sinti in interwar Czechoslovakia, see e.g.: Ctibor Nečas, První opatření na Moravě a ve Slezsku podle zákona č. 117/1927 Sbzn. Zákaz vstupu tzv. potulných cikánů do některých regionů a obcí [The First Measures in Moravia and Silesia Pursuant to Act No. 117/1927 Coll. Prohibition of So-Called Wandering Gypsies on Entering Certain Regions and Municipalities], in: Acta Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Ostraviensis, Historica 9 (2002), 17-26; Jana Horváthová, Meziválečné zastavení mezi Romy v českých zemích (aneb tušení souvislostí) [Visiting Roma in the Czech Lands during the Interwar Period (or Anticipating Connections)], in: Romano Džaniben 1 (2005), 63-84; Pavel Baloun, Von der 'Landplage' zur 'fremden Rasse'. Die Repräsentation der Zigeuner in der tschechoslowakischen Kriminalistik (1918–1939), in: Bohemia 59 (2019) 1, 50-76; Idem, "We Beg You Not To Equate the Names of Gypsies and Knife-Grinders with Honest Traders". Itinerant Trade and the Racialisation of 'Gypsies' in the Czech Lands between 1918 and 1938, in: S.I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation. 6 (2019) 2, 44-55.

Gypsy plague,<sup>34</sup> were gradually applied there, too.<sup>35</sup> In Nazi Germany, the terms ‘Gypsy’ and ‘Gypsy half-breed’ were already racially defined as “alien race” (“art-fremd”) in the in connection with the Reich Citizenship Law from 1935. In the Protectorate legislation, the socially-based definition codified in the law from 1927 continued to be broadly applied until 1942. According to archival documents, the Dycha family from the village of Hrušky were not considered to be ‘wandering Gypsies’ on the basis of the older legislation.<sup>36</sup> However, along with other individuals and families identified racially as ‘Gypsies’ or ‘Gypsy half-breeds’, the Dychas became subject to the ‘solution to the Gypsy question’ in the Protectorate.

On 28 March 1939, only two weeks after the occupation of the remainder of Bohemia and Moravia, the commander of a gendarmerie investigation station in Uherské Hradiště sent a message to all gendarmerie stations in the district about the forced admission of ‘Gypsies’ to the newly established disciplinary labour camps. These facilities were to be established in accordance with an order of the Czech-Slovak government of 2 March 1939 and were to serve for the three-month deployment each of ‘antisocial’ men without a properly secured livelihood. Disciplinary labour camps were finally opened in August 1940 in Lety u Písku and Hodonín u Kunštátu.<sup>37</sup> On 29 March 1939, the commander of the gendarmerie station in Hrušky reported that only one ‘Gypsy’ family resided in the gendarmerie district. He wrote: “This family and its members do not wander and are employed occasionally by local peasants, so they are not eligible for admission to the disciplinary labour camps. There are no other wandering Gypsies in the district [...]”<sup>38</sup> The gendarmerie in Hrušky sent similar reports about ‘Gypsies’ to superior authorities several more times.<sup>39</sup> Between 1940 and 1942, the school in Hrušky had to report regularly to the District School Committee in Hodonín on the smooth and regular attendance of five “school-attending Gypsy children”.<sup>40</sup> Although we do not know the real motivations and intentions of these local authorities, their positive or neutral reports and evaluations may in the first four years of occupation have protected the Roma from Hrušky from possible persecution (imprisonment in a disciplinary labour camp for adult male family members, later in a detention camp, and then in the ‘Gypsy camp’).

Meanwhile, a major shift in addressing the ‘Gypsy question’ in the Protectorate was taking place. From mid-1942, an openly racial ‘anti-Gypsy’ policy was carried out, following the rules of the ‘Third Reich’. The culmination of these measures was the adoption of the decree on Combatting the Gypsy Plague on 10 July 1942. On the grounds of this decree, the Protectorate authorities, following the instructions of the German Criminal Police in the Protectorate, conducted a census of all ‘Gypsies, Gypsy half-breeds, and people living in the Gypsy manner’ on 2 August

34 Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies*, New York/Oxford 2000, 52-55.

35 For more information on the persecution of the Roma and Sinti population in the Czech lands in the years 1939–1945, see e.g.: Kladivová, *Konečná stanice*; Nečas, *Nad osudem*; Idem, *Vězňové*; Idem, *Českoslovenští Romové*; Idem, *Tragédie*; Idem, *Holocaust českých Romů*.

36 SOKABM, Četnická stanice Hrušky [Gendarmerie Station Hrušky] (ČSH), box 1, fol. 317.

37 See e.g.: Ctibor Nečas, *Seznam vězňů kárného pracovního (sběrného) tábora v Hodoníně* [List of Prisoners of the Disciplinary Labour (Collection) Camp in Hodonín], in: *Bulletin Muzea romské kultury* 11-12 (2002/03), 91-92; Idem, *Kárný pracovní (sběrný) tábor I a internovaní v něm cikáni* [Disciplinary Labour (Collection) Camp I and Interned Gypsies], in: *Bulletin Muzea romské kultury* 18 (2009), 163-166; Idem, *Cikáni a “cikáni” v Letech* [Gypsies and “Gypsies” in Lety], in: *Živá historie*, April (2011), 35-37.

38 SOKABM, Četnická stanice Hrušky [Gendarmerie Station Hrušky] (ČSH), box 1, fol. 317.

39 SOKABM, ČSH, k. 2, reference no. 142/40, 15. 1. 1940; MZA, B 40, Zemský úřad Brno [Provincial Office Brno], III. manipulace, I., (1886) 1936–1945, box 2399, fol. 92, 42, 80.

40 SOKABM, NŠH, inv. n. 409, Jednací protokol [Protocol of Procedure] (1936–1944), reference no. 463/1940, reference no. 104/1942.



1942. Around 6,500 persons included in the registry dating back to 1927 were now described as ‘Gypsies or Gypsy half-breeds’. Most of them were put under police surveillance and were thus left with limited mobility but in relative freedom. About a third were immediately interned in the newly established concentration camps for ‘Gypsies’ in Lety u Písku in Bohemia and in Hodonín u Kunštátu in Moravia.<sup>41</sup>

These camps were an integral part of the Nazi genocide of the Roma and Sinti in Czech territory. In both camps, thousands of men, women, and children of all ages suffered under catastrophic hygienic, accommodation, and working conditions, constant hunger, diseases, and humiliation.<sup>42</sup> In Lety u Písku, a total of about 1,300 people were imprisoned during the existence of the camp (August 1942 to August 1943), about 330 of whom died there while another 500 were further deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>43</sup> Approximately 1,400 people were interned in Hodonín u Kunštátu from August 1942 to August 1943, with more than 200 dying as a result of the camp conditions and over 800 being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>44</sup>

Deportations of the European Roma and Sinti population to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp were carried out from 1943 onwards on the grounds of the so-called Auschwitz decree of the Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler of 16 December 1942. The first mass deportation of about 1,000 Roma and Sinti left the Protectorate from Brno on 6 March 1943.<sup>45</sup> It was followed by further transports of Roma and Sinti from various parts of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as from both ‘Gypsy camps’. The majority of the Protectorate Roma and Sinti was deported in mass transports on 7 March (over 1,000 persons departing from Brno), 11 March (about 650 persons departing from Prague), and 19 March 1943 (over 1,000 persons departing from Olomouc). Smaller groups were deported during 1944. In total, about 5,500 people were affected.<sup>46</sup>

41 Nečas, *Holocaust českých Romů*, 15-21; Idem, *Romové na Moravě a ve Slezsku (1740–1945)* [Roma in Moravia and Silesia (1740–1945)], Brno 2005, 263.

42 For more information on the ‘Gypsy camps’ in the Protectorate, see e.g.: Nečas, *Věznové*; Idem, *Tragédie*; Idem, *Kolik vězňů prošlo internacemi protektorátních cikánských táborů?* [How Many Prisoners Were Interned in the Protectorate Gypsy Camps?], in: *Časopis matice moravské* 114 (1995), 352-364; Idem, *Personál protektorátních cikánských táborů* [The Staff of the Protectorate Gypsy Camps], in: *Vlastivědný věstník moravský* 49 (1997), 294-298; Idem, *Holocaust českých Romů*; Idem, *Židovští lékaři v cikánských táborech* [Jewish Doctors in the Gypsy Camps], in: *Romano Džaniben* 7 (2000), 58-61.

43 For more information on the ‘Gypsy camp’ in Lety u Písku, see e.g.: Petr Lhotka, *Lékařská vyšetření Romů určených k transportu do cikánského tábora v Letech u Písku v srpnu 1942* [Medical Examinations of Roma for Transport to the Gypsy Camp in Lety u Písku in August 1942], in: *Bulletin Muzea romské kultury* 4 (1995), 31-32; Ctibor Nečas, *Zpráva o počtu, struktuře a osudech vězňů tzv. cikánského tábora v Letech* [Report on the Number, Structure, and Fate of Prisoners in the So-Called Gypsy Camp in Lety], in: *Bulletin Muzea romské kultury* 16 (2007), 117-122; Idem, *Cikánský tábor v Letech (1942–1943)* [The Gypsy Camp in Lety (1942–1943)], in: *Romano Džaniben* 1 (2008), 186-197; Idem, *Pamětní seznam – I*; Petr Klinovský, *Velitelé “cikánského tábora” v Letech u Písku* [The Commanders of the “Gypsy Camp” in Lety u Písku], in: *Bulletin Muzea romské kultury* 24 (2015), 25-41.

44 For more information on the ‘Gypsy camp’ in Hodonín u Kunštátu, see e.g.: Ctibor Nečas, *Cikáni v Hodoníně u Kunštátu v letech 1940–1943* [The Gypsies of Hodonín u Kunštátu in 1940–1943], in: *Vlastivědný věstník moravský* 25 (1973), 277-283; Idem, *Cikáni v Hodoníně u Kunštátu v letech 1940–1943 (dokončení)* [The Gypsies of Hodonín u Kunštátu in 1940–1943 (Conclusion)], in: *Vlastivědný věstník moravský* 26 (1974), 26-33; Idem, *Ma bisteren – nezapomeňme. Historie cikánského tábora v Hodoníně u Kunštátu* [Ma bisteren – Do Not Forget. History of the Gypsy Camp in Hodonín u Kunštátu], Prague 1997; Idem, *Romové na Moravě*, 265-286; Idem, *Pamětní seznam. II*.

45 For more information on the transport, see e.g.: Nečas, *Z Brna do Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

46 For more information on the transports of Roma and Sinti from the Protectorate, see e.g.: Ctibor Nečas, *Z Protektorátu Čechy a Morava do Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Hromadný transport 7. 5. 1943* [From the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to Auschwitz II-Birkenau. The Mass Transport of 7 May 1943], in: *Sborník prací filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity*, C 42 (1995), 139-145; Idem, *Holocaust českých Romů*, 34-140; Idem, *Z Brna do Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

The Dycha family was first included on the mass transport of protectorate ‘Gypsies’, which was sent to Auschwitz from Olomouc on 19 March 1943 with about 1,000 men, women, and children, mostly Roma and Sinti from Moravia.<sup>47</sup> In the end, however, the Dycha family was not included on this transport – someone in charge decided on their (temporary) release at the assembly point in Strážnice and let them return to their place of residence.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, the archival sources do not reveal the details of their (temporary) release. We can only assume that the good social relations of the Dychas within the village played a role and that it could have been an intervention by local authorities, such as the mayor, as was the case with the later rescue of Damián Danihel/Malík. Their (temporary) release is also confirmed by archival documents, such as the municipal accounts of March and May 1943, which mention “tickets for Gypsies”, which had to be paid from the municipality’s finances.<sup>49</sup>

However, their release in March did not save them. The Dycha family was again summoned for deportation in May 1943 and included on the fourth mass transport of ‘Gypsies’ from the Protectorate. Mráz wrote about their tragic fate:

“[...] the year 1943 came, when the concentration of all persons of Gypsy origin was ordered. The petitions of the mayor, Metoděj Hrabě, were all futile. At their departure, a large number of locals came to say goodbye to the Gypsies at the railway station and brought them packages with food and clothes.”<sup>50</sup>

The departure of the Dycha family from Hrušky was also documented by the school. For example, the class teacher commented next to Rozálie Dychová’s name in the class book of the seventh grade: “On 5 May 1943 she moved to an unknown place.”<sup>51</sup> Even today, witnesses, former classmates of Dycha’s children, remember the deportation.<sup>52</sup> M. B., who lived with her parents near the Dychas at the time, said: “We liked them as children, they were really decent. I remember that we were horrified when suddenly a car came and took them.”<sup>53</sup> L. S. recalled that the Dychas were first taken to Strážnice:

“In 1943, of course, they simply picked them up here, it was the Protectorate, the Germans, and took them to Strážnice. They were there in Strážnice and then I don’t know what happened to them anymore. [...] And none of them returned.”<sup>54</sup>

Mr. and Mrs. Dycha along with all their eight children were taken to Hodonín, where ‘Gypsies’ from the region were being gathered for a mass deportation consisting of about 860 men, women, and children, which arrived at the ‘Gypsy camp’ in Auschwitz-Birkenau on 7 May 1943. Among the deported were further relatives of Josef Dycha, who lived outside of Hrušky.<sup>55</sup>

While previous mass transports of ‘Gypsies’ from the Protectorate included the Roma and Sinti population so far living in relative freedom, the fourth mass trans-

47 Idem, *Usedlí strážničtí Cikáni*, 63–78.

48 SOKABM, *Četnická stanice Moravská Nová Ves* [Gerdarmerie Station Moravská Nová Ves], book 7, inv. n. 7.

49 SOKABM, AOH, *Pokladní deník* [Cash Register Book] (1943–1946), 4, 5, 7; *Ibid.*, *Hlavní účetní kniha* [General Ledger] (1943), 18.

50 VKH, Mráz, *Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky*.

51 SOKABM, NŠH, inv. n. 343, 17.

52 Interviews held on 5 November 2018 in Hrušky with L. S., J. M., A. L., M. B., J. J., and V. N.

53 Interview held on 5 November 2018 in Hrušky with M. B.

54 Interview held on 5 November 2018 in Hrušky with L. S.

55 *Gedenkbuch. Die Sinti und Roma im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau/Memorial Book. The Gypsies at Auschwitz-Birkenau / Księga Pamięci. Cyganie w obozie koncentracyjnym Auschwitz-Birkenau*. Vols. 1 & 2. Munich/London/New York/Paris 1993; <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/auschwitz-prisoners/> (13 August 2021).

port was to contain most of the prisoners of the 'Gypsy camp' of Lety u Písku. Additionally, Moravian Roma and Sinti who had not been deported from Brno or Olomouc in March 1943 or who had been removed from these two Moravian transports and left for a few weeks in temporary freedom, were deported on this transport. The place of dispatch of the Moravian part of the transport was the city of Brno, where the Roma and Sinti population from several Moravian localities was concentrated.<sup>56</sup> One of the large local gathering points for this transport was the Moravian town of Hodonín, to where the Dycha family was brought.<sup>57</sup>

Roma and Sinti from European countries directly controlled by the Nazis (besides the Protectorate including Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Poland, and others) were imprisoned in a special section in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, called B-II-e or the 'Gypsy family camp'. As in the 'Terezín family camp', which existed at the same time in Auschwitz, families were here accommodated together. Over 22,000 men, women, and children were gradually interned in 32 wooden barracks in an area measuring 150 x 170 meter. The prisoners suffered under constant humiliation, extreme physical and psychological violence, as well as persistent anxiety, hunger, and disease. Catastrophic accommodation and lack of food, general exhaustion, and numerous diseases caused a high mortality rate in the 'Gypsy family camp', which reached a critical state in the summer of 1943 and then again in the winter of 1943/1944.<sup>58</sup> According to the camp records, some 4,500 of these inmates came from the Protectorate.<sup>59</sup>

The fate of the Dycha family from Hrušky during their imprisonment in Auschwitz-Birkenau can be reconstructed on the basis of preserved materials from the archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. All the family members died there in 1943 and 1944 due to the catastrophic living conditions.<sup>60</sup> The father, Josef Dycha, was assigned the prisoner number Z-7574 and died on 2 July 1943. The mother, Estera Dychová (Z-8266), died on 30 October 1943. One by one, their children also died: Helena (Z-8271) on 26 May 1943, Josef (Z-7576) on 1 July 1943, Jaroslav (Z-7575) on 13 July 1943, Jan (Z-7577) on 2 November 1943, Josefa (Z-8269) on 11 December 1943, Rozálie (Z-8267) on 4 January 1944, Marie (Z-8270) on 9 January 1944, and Anna (Z-8268) on 11 February 1944. None of them were still alive by the time the 'Gypsy family camp' was liquidated and its inmates murdered in the gas chambers of Birkenau in August 1944.<sup>61</sup>

56 Nečas, *Romové na Moravě*, 299.

57 Státní okresní archiv Hodonín [State District Archive in Hodonín], Archiv města Hodonín [Archives of the Town of Hodonín], inv. n. 298, *Kronika města Hodonína (1936–1944)* [Chronicle of the Town of Hodonín], 598; Dušan Slačka, "Cikánská otázka" na Hodonínsku v letech 1945–1973 [The "Gypsy Question" in the Hodonín Region in 1945–1973], (MA Thesis) Brno 2015, 46.

58 For more information on the 'Gypsy camp' in Auschwitz-Birkenau, see e.g.: Gedenkbuch. Slawomir Kapral-ski/Maria Martyniak/Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Voices of Memory 7. Roma in Auschwitz*, Oświęcim 2011.

59 For more information on the Roma and Sinti prisoners from the territory of today's Czech Republic, see e.g.: Nečas, *Aušvicate hi kher báro; Holy/Nečas, Žalující píseň; Ctibor Nečas, Cikánský tábor v Auschwitz-Birkenau a jeho nejmladší vězňové* [The Gypsy Camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Its Youngest Prisoners], in: *Časopis matice moravské* 113 (1994), 171–178; Idem, *Útěky českých Romů z osvětímského táborového komplexu* [Escapes of Czech Roma from the Auschwitz Camp Complex], in: *Vlastivědný věstník moravský* 47 (1995), 70–73; Idem, *Nad rubrikami hlavních knih osvětímského cikánského tábora* [On the Main Books of the Auschwitz Gypsy Camp], in: *Časopis Matice moravské* 126 (2007), 353–366; Idem, *Narodili se a zahynuli v osvětímském cikánském táboře* [They Were Born and Perished in the Gypsy Camp in Auschwitz], in: *Romano Džaniben* 14 (2007), 170–185.

60 For enabling my research and sending copies of the relevant documents I thank the staff of the Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, especially the Head of the Archives Wojciech Płosa and Piotr Supiński from the Bureau for Former Prisoners.

61 Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oświęcim, Catalogue of Prisoners.



**Damián Danihel after 1945**  
(Vlastivědný kroužek Hrušky [Hrušky Local Historical Club]).

### Damián Danihel – The Only Survivor

After liberation in 1945, only about 600 men, women, and children from the original Bohemian and Moravian Roma and Sinti population returned from the concentration camps and other internment or forced labour facilities. Only a tenth of the Roma and Sinti survived the Nazi terror in the Czech lands. In 1945, they returned to a restored Czechoslovakia with broken health and in a rather uncertain and dismal social state. The survivors also had to cope with the loss of their relatives and the fundamental deterioration of their social status.<sup>62</sup>

The only Roma from Hrušky who had not been deported to a concentration camp was Estera Dychová's son Damián Danihel, known in the village under the surname Malík. According to Mráz and some witnesses, his Slovak citizenship saved his life.<sup>63</sup> Damián possessed the right of residence due to his birth in the Slovak village of Čáry and was therefore considered a foreign national in the territory of the Protectorate. Between 1940 and 1942, he repeatedly applied for a residence in Hrušky, but because of his age (he was not yet 21 years old), the council dismissed him.<sup>64</sup> When in May 1941 the District Office in Hodonín dealt with his application for a residence permit, the gendarmerie station in Hrušky was subsequently asked by the District Office to

62 Ctibor Nečas, *Matriky moravských Romů, kteří přežili nucenou táborovou koncentraci* [Registries of Moravian Roma Who Survived the Forced Concentration in Camps], in: *Bulletin Muzea romské kultury* 15-16 (2006/07), 124-128, 112-116.

63 VKH, Mráz, *Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky*; Interviews held on 5 November 2018 in Hrušky with L. S., J. M., A. L., M. B., J. J., and V. N.

64 SOKABM, AOH, *Protokolární kniha obecního zastupitelstva* [Protocol Book of the Municipal Council] (26 August 1938 to 5 May 1947), 80, 92, 103.

register him as a foreigner.<sup>65</sup> According to witnesses, the then mayor Metoděj Hrabě and his predecessor and Danihel's employer, the farmer Vojtěch Hřebačka, also contributed to Danihel's rescue. During the war and for some time after its end, Damián worked for the latter and lived in his house.<sup>66</sup>

According to witnesses, Danihel was an excellent singer of Moravian folk songs and took part in many social events in Hrušky, including traditional feasts. This is also documented by a unique post-war photograph of Danihel, which the local historical club in Hrušky holds in its collections. It depicts him along with one of the inhabitants of Hrušky in a local folk costume. The same photo is also part of an article entitled "Slovak Feast in the Village of Hrušky u Břeclavi", which was published on 15 September 1951 in the magazine *Svět v obrazech* (The World in Pictures), a weekly of the Ministry of Information and Public Education.<sup>67</sup>

Danihel later moved to Slovakia and visited Hrušky only occasionally as a peddler of wicker brooms.<sup>68</sup> In Slovakia, he founded a family (he had four sons and a daughter) and lived in the village of Lakšárska Nová Ves (Senica District), where he is also buried (he died in 1985).<sup>69</sup> His descendants currently live in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and the war story of Danihel and his family from Hrušky is still alive in their families.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

The case study presented here contributes to the documentation of the life of Roma and Sinti in the territory of today's Czech Republic in the first half of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the period 1939–1945. At the same time, it shows how focussing on a specific place, community, or family through written and oral history sources can change perspectives and enrich research based on documents of central authorities and institutions. The story of the Dycha family from Hrušky reveals, on the basis of the available sources, the persecution measures aimed at persons identified as 'Gypsies' and 'Gypsy half-breeds' in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and thus shows the preparation and implementation of genocide at the local level. This perspective allows us to consider coexistence and persecution at the local level and qualifies the impact of measures undertaken at the state level. This case study is therefore a contribution to the history of local Roma communities, families, and individuals in the context of a centrally controlled and implemented 'solution to the Gypsy question' in the interwar and war period in the territory of the Czech Republic.

My research shows that, in the specific case of the Dycha family, long-term social and economic ties with the neighbouring non-Roma population and community representatives could play an important role. This is obvious, for example, from the

65 SOKABM, ČSH, book 23, Podací protokol obyčejný [Register of Incoming Correspondence] (1940–1941), reference no. 1219/41.

66 VKH, Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky; Interviews held on 5 November 2018 in Hrušky with L. S., J. M., A. L., M. B., J. J., and V. N.

67 Suovácké hody v obci Hrušky u Břeclavi, in: Svět v obrazech [Slovak feast in the Community of Hrušky u Břeclavi]. Týdeník Ministerstva informací a osvěty, 15 September 1951, 18-19.

68 VKH, Mráz, Zápisky ke kronice obce Hrušky; Interviews held on 5 November 2018 in Hrušky with L. S., J. M., A. L., M. B., J. J., and V. N.

69 Městský úřad Moravské Budějovice [Municipal Office of Moravské Budějovice], *Kniha úmrtí Moravské Budějovice* [Death Book of Moravské Budějovice], 1985.

70 Interview with V. D. in Litoňov, 11 March 2019; with A. D. in Kolárovo, 7 August 2019; with J. D. in Malacky, 8 August 2019; and with T. D. in Lakšárska Nová Ves, 8 August 2019.

successful negotiation of acquiring the right of residence, building a new house, or gaining a livelihood and a job. These circumstances were crucial at a time when the family was identified by the authorities as ‘racial Gypsies’ and was persecuted as such. As follows from the memories of witnesses and archival documents, the inhabitants of the village showed a certain solidarity while village representatives also tried (although unsuccessfully in the end) to save the whole family from deportation to a concentration camp.

The case study raises a number of additional questions and topics that need to be further addressed. Of particular interest are the topics indicated of escorting designated individuals to the mass transports destined for concentration camps and the possibility of excluding some individuals from mass transports on the basis of the intervention of municipal officials. Another interesting topic is the question of whether local people elsewhere tried to save ‘their Gypsies’, what motivated these efforts, and whether they were successful and why. The presented case study may thus be part of future comparative research of inclusion and exclusion, or also remembrance, at the local level, which could bring new insights into the topic of Nazi genocide of Roma and Sinti.

**Michal Schuster** is a historian and researcher at the Terezín Initiative Institute in Prague. He works mainly on the project of the “Database of the Victims of the National Socialist Persecution of ‘Gypsies’”. From 2005 to 2016, he worked as a curator and historian in the Museum of Roma Culture in Brno. Since 2005, he has been cooperating with the association Živá paměť (Live Memory) in Prague on the educational project Disappeared Roma and Roma Today. As an external educator, he works in the Department of Multicultural Education of the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University in Brno. He specialises in the history of the Roma and Sinti in the Czech Republic and also occasionally publishes and lectures for the professional and non-professional public. E-mail: [michal.schuster@terezinstudies.cz](mailto:michal.schuster@terezinstudies.cz)

---

Quotation: Michal Schuster: The Dycha Family from the Village of Hrušky: Microhistory of the Nazi Genocide of the Roma and Sinti in the Czech Republic, in: S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation. 8 (2021) 2, 72-85.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.23777/SN.0221/ART\\_MSCH01](https://doi.org/10.23777/SN.0221/ART_MSCH01)

S:I.M.O.N.– Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON. is the semi-annual open access e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) in English and German.

This special issue devoted to research in the history of the Holocaust in Bohemian Lands was prepared in cooperation with the Terezín Initiative Institute in Prague and the Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences. It represents the continuation of the “Terezín Studies and Documents”, a scholarly yearbook founded by Holocaust survivors Miroslav Kárný and Margita Kárná which significantly contributed to the research in the history of the Holocaust in the Bohemian Lands. The preparation was supported by the Czech Foundation for the Holocaust Victims.

ISSN 2408-9192 | 8 (2021) 2 | <https://doi.org/10.23777/SN.0221>

This article is licensed under the following Creative Commons License: CC-BY-NC-ND (Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives)