

SPECIAL TREATMENT IN AUSCHWITZ  
ORIGIN AND MEANING OF A TERM



# Special Treatment in Auschwitz

Origin and Meaning of a Term

**Carlo Mattogno**



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Cover Illustration: Top: arrival of Jews from Hungary at the Auschwitz-Birkenau railway ramp in spring/summer 1944, where the inmates were “selected” (foreground), and a special unit handled the deportees’ baggage (background). Left: Order for a gas-tight door for a fumigation chamber of the same kind as ordered for “special treatment of the Jews” (see Doc. 14 in the Appendix). Right: travel permit to pick up “material for special treatment” (Zyklon B for delousing Jewish deportees; see Doc. 13 in the Appendix). Bottom: the “*Zentralsauna*” in Birkenau, a large shower and disinfestation facility for the “special treatment” (cleaning) of inmates (Wiki Commons, photographer: Konrad Kurzac).

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## Preface

In the anthology *Nazi Mass Murder*, Adalbert Rückerl writes of the meaning of the term “special treatment”:<sup>1</sup>

*“In all areas involving the physical extermination of people, the code word was ‘special treatment’ – Sonderbehandlung, sometimes shortened on the initials SB.”*

It cannot be disputed that in numerous documents of the Third Reich, the term “special treatment” is, in fact, synonymous with execution or liquidation,<sup>2</sup> but this does not mean that the meaning of this term *always and exclusively* had this significance. We have available to us other documents, in which “special treatment” was by no means equivalent to killing,<sup>3</sup> as well as those, in which the word described privileged treatment. Thus, for example, a document dated November 25, 1939, with the title “The Question of the Treatment of the Populace of the Former Polish Territories from a Racial-Political Standpoint” contains guidelines for the “special treatment of racially valuable children,” which consists of “exempting from resettlement” the children concerned “and rearing them in the Old Reich in proper educational institutions, according to the manner of the earlier Potsdam military orphanages, or under the care of German families.” The “special treatment of the non-Polish minorities” mentioned in the same document likewise signifies preferential treatment:<sup>4</sup>

*“The great mass of the populace of these minorities, however, is to be left in their homelands and should not be subjected to special restrictions in their daily lives.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Eugen Kogon, Hermann Langbein, Adalbert Rückerl (eds.), *Nazi Mass Murder*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1993, p. 5. The original German term is “*Sonderbehandlung*.”

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 3040-PS, from *Allgemeine Erlaßsammlung*, Part 2, A III f (treatment of foreign civilian workers), issued by the *RSHA*; as punishment for foreign civilian workers for serious crimes, the special treatment of hanging is ordered.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for example my article “*Sonderbehandlung. Georges Wellers und der Korherr-Bericht*,” in: *Vierteljahreshefte für freie Geschichtsforschung* 1(2) (1997), pp. 71-75.

<sup>4</sup> PS-660, pp. 18, 24f.

The “special treatment” of prominent prisoners from states hostile to the Third Reich in luxury hotels with princely treatment is so well known that we need not deal with it at length.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, we have at our disposal a great number of important documents, in which the expression “special treatment” (as well as other alleged “code words” like “special measures,”<sup>6</sup> “special operation,”<sup>7</sup> or “special unit”<sup>8</sup>) exhibit an entire palette of varied meanings, which nonetheless refer to perfectly normal aspects of camp life in Auschwitz and which in no single instance indicate the murder of human beings. These documents are for the most part unknown to researchers, and those already well known have been and are given distorted interpretations by the representatives of the official historiography.

In the present study these documents are made accessible to the reader and analyzed in their historical context, and cross-references are made. In doing so, we show what the documents actually say and not what the “decipherment” and mechanistic interpretation of supposed “code words” allegedly reveal. In reality, “special treatment” was by no means a “code word,” behind which the unspeakable was concealed, but rather a bureaucratic concept, which – depending on the context of its use – designated entirely different things, all the way from liquidation to preferred treatment. This fact refutes the interpretation advocated by the official historiography, according to which “special treatment” is supposed to have *always* been synonymous with murder, with no ifs, ands, or buts.

The results of the present study of the origin and meaning of “special treatment” in Auschwitz, it should be well understood, pertain solely to the theme dealt with here. They do not extend to the existing uncontested documents – clearly not originating from Auschwitz – in which the term “special treatment” actually did refer to executions. Yet even those documents cannot alter in any way the validity of the conclusions presented here.

Carlo Mattogno  
Rome, September 5, 2003

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<sup>5</sup> *International Military Tribunal*, Nuremberg 1947, Vol. 11, pp. 336-339; first mentioned by Arthur R. Butz, *The Hoax of the 20th Century*, Historical Review Press, Brighton 1976, pp. 147-149; cf. the 4th edition, Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2015, pp. 158.

<sup>6</sup> German: “*Sondermaßnahmen*.”

<sup>7</sup> German: “*Sonderaktion*.”

<sup>8</sup> German: “*Sonderkommando*.”



## Introduction

During the investigations leading to the two Polish Auschwitz trials conducted directly after the war,<sup>9</sup> the term “special treatment” (*Sonderbehandlung*) as well as expressions related to it, such as “special operation” (*Sonderaktion*), “special measure” (*Sondermaßnahme*) etc., were systematically interpreted as “code words” for the gassing of human beings. By the end of 1946, the *Główna Komisja badania zbrodni niemieckich w Polsce* (Chief Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland) had developed the orthodox interpretation of this term that was gradually to become an unshakeable cornerstone of the orthodox narrative of Auschwitz.<sup>10</sup>

*“The real key to the decipherment of all these code words comes from the letter of Bischoff, no. 21242/43 of January 13, 1943, according to which the crematoria were indispensable facilities for carrying out the special treatment. In this document, he wrote the following verbatim:<sup>[11]</sup> ‘Above all, the doors ordered for the crematorium in the PoW camp, which is urgently required for the implementation of the special measures, are to be delivered immediately.’ The content of this letter as well as the fact that four modern crematoria with powerful gas chambers were constructed in the area of the Brzezinka [Birkenau] camp, which in the letter of December 16, 1942, are referred to as ‘special facilities’ and in the letter of August 21, 1942 (file memo no. 12115/42) as ‘bathing facilities for special operations,’ prove that the German authorities were concealing the mass-murder of millions of human beings with the code words ‘special treatment,’ ‘special measure’ and ‘special operation,’ and that the special camp, which was established for carrying out this ‘special treatment,’ was a huge extermination camp right from its inception.”*

Therefore, in order to deduce a criminal meaning from expressions beginning with “special” (*Sonder-*), the Polish commission began its “decoding” with the assumption that homicidal gas chambers were located in the crematoria of

<sup>9</sup> The Höss trial (Proces Rudolfa Hössa, March 1947) as well as the trial of the camp staff of Auschwitz (Proces Żalogi, November-December 1947).

<sup>10</sup> Jan Sehn, “*Obóz koncentracyjny i zagłady Oświęcim*,” in: *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji badania zbrodni niemieckich w Polsce*, Vol. I, Warsaw 1946, pp. 70f. The relevant section was later incorporated in the indictment of February 11, 1947, against Rudolf Höss (Höss trial, Volume 9, pp. 76f.).

<sup>11</sup> Actually, the passage cited contains an omission which has not been indicated. Cf. for this Chapter 16 of Part Two, where I analyze the document concerned.

Birkenau. Later, the official historiography switched to the converse argument: Starting from the premise that a criminal meaning was inherent in these terms, it derived from this the existence of homicidal gas chambers in Auschwitz. In this way, a pseudo-logical circular reasoning came into being which leads from expressions beginning with “special” to homicidal gas chambers, and returns back from these gas chambers to the pertinent “special” terms. In this vicious circle orthodox historiography has been trapped for decades. The term “special unit” (*Sonderkommando*) also belongs into that same “logical” framework. Orthodox historians always used this term to refer exclusively to the staff of the crematoria in order to create the illusion that criminal activities took place in these facilities.<sup>12</sup>

The opening of the Moscow Archives, despite the enormous mass of documents made accessible to researchers thereby, resulted only in insignificant corrections to the arguments developed the Poles right after the war. Jean-Claude Pressac, who was the first to study the documents of the Central Construction Office of Auschwitz, emphatically maintained:<sup>13</sup>

*“The extraordinary abundance of materials that the Soviet Army brought back permits an almost seamless reconstruction of the criminals’ inventiveness.”*

and he adds that the documentation now available makes possible

*“an historical reconstruction that does without oral or written eyewitness reports, which are ultimately fallible and become ever less accurate with time.”*<sup>13</sup>

But in Pressac’s “historical reconstruction,” his interpretation of the special treatment in Auschwitz proves to be without documentary basis. In this respect, Pressac’s method manifests enormous deficiencies.

The same applies even more to Robert Jan van Pelt, author of a 438-page expert report dedicated to a large extent to the Auschwitz camp (*The Pelt Report*). It was submitted during the libel suit of British historian David Irving against Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher Penguin Books (which ended on April 11, 2000, with Irving’s defeat). This expert report was published as a book in 2002 in a revised and expanded form.<sup>14</sup> In it, van Pelt presented a sketchy reprise of Pressac’s theses, and with regard to the topic at hand, as well as with regard to many other issues, he remained well below the quality level of the French scholar’s exposition.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This question is discussed in Chapter 21 of Part Two.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Claude Pressac, *Die Krematorien von Auschwitz. Die Technik des Massenmordes*, Piper, Munich 1994, p. 2. For a critique of Pressac, cf. G. Rudolf (ed.), *Auschwitz: Plain Facts*, 2nd ed., Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Robert J. van Pelt, *The Case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving Trial*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington/Indianapolis 2002.

<sup>15</sup> See in this regard C. Mattogno, *The Real Case for Auschwitz: Robert van Pelt’s Evidence from the Irving Trial Critically Reviewed*, 2nd ed., Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2015.

According to orthodox historiography, the beginning of special treatment in Auschwitz coincided with the first “selection,”<sup>16</sup> which took place on July 4, 1942. Under this date the *Auschwitz Chronicle* notes:<sup>17</sup>

“For the first time, the camp administration carries out a selection among the Jews sent to the camp; these are in an RSHA<sup>[18]</sup> transport from Slovakia. During the selection, 264 men from the transport are chosen as able-bodied and admitted to the camp as registered prisoners. They receive Nos. 44727–44990. In addition, 108 women are selected and given Nos. 8389–8496. The rest of the people are taken to the bunker and killed with gas.”

This interpretation leads to another circular reasoning, since unregistered prisoners can be regarded as “gassed” only if one assumes *a priori* the existence of extermination facilities in the Bunkers of Birkenau, based upon mere eye-witness statements.

The new documentation mentioned by Pressac allows a complete picture to be drawn of the facilities in Auschwitz which were finished in the first half of 1942, and it permits us to verify how well-founded claims about the homicidal function of these bunkers really are.

However, instead of undertaking this verification, Pressac uncritically parroted the interpretation promoted by orthodox historiography and even attempted to round it out by referring to a document in which the expression “special treatment” appears, but which has nothing to do with the so-called bunkers. I shall examine this question more closely in Chapter 4 of Part One.

This is most certainly not the only weak point of Pressac’s method. In his “historical reconstruction,” he never even attempted to study the great abundance of recently accessible documents in which expressions beginning with “special” occur.

Despite these serious weaknesses, Pressac was the most renowned representative of orthodox historiography concerning Auschwitz.<sup>19</sup> For this reason it seemed appropriate to take his conclusions as a starting point for my investigation.

In 2014, the Auschwitz Museum published an important book containing 74 documents, many of which are pertinent to the present study and have previously been unknown or ignored.<sup>20</sup> I have dealt with this collection in detail in my book *Curated Lies: The Auschwitz Museum’s Misrepresentations, Dis-*

<sup>16</sup> The term then used by Germans was *aussortieren* (sorting out), not *selektieren*. Editor’s comment.

<sup>17</sup> Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939-1945*, H. Holt, New York 1990, pp. 191f.

<sup>18</sup> *Reichssicherheitshauptamt, RSHA* = Reich Security Main Office.

<sup>19</sup> Pressac died on July 23, 2003, at the age of 59.

<sup>20</sup> Igor Bartosik, Lukasz Martyniak, Piotr Setkiewicz, *The Beginnings of the Extermination of Jews in KL Auschwitz in the Light of the Source Materials*, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Auschwitz 2014.

*tortions and Deceptions*,<sup>21</sup> so where necessary, I will limit myself here to pointing out these new documents and referring to *Curated Lies* for further study.

\* \* \*

The purpose of the present study is the documentary examination of the hypothesis proposed by the Polish postwar commission, which was later generally appropriated by orthodox historiography, as well as the emendations made to it by Pressac. The problem of mass gassing of Jews in Auschwitz is not the immediate subject of this study, since answering the question of whether there were homicidal gas chambers in Auschwitz is not the aim here, but rather whether or not expressions beginning with “special” refer to possibly existing homicidal gas chambers or to mass gassings.

Since the analysis I proposed is of a documentary nature, the problem of the prisoners deported to Auschwitz, but not registered there, will merely be treated in passing, as I have discussed this topic in yet another dedicated study which in a way complements the present study.<sup>22</sup> After all, the documents cited in Chapters 1 and 7 of Part Two incontestably prove that in August and September of 1942 the Jews deported to Auschwitz were shipped farther to the east and that one of their destinations was a camp in Russia.

As far as possible, the discussion of the documents presented in this study follows terminological and chronological criteria, but in view of the dense interweaving of the themes treated, this is not always possible.

The references to cremation in Auschwitz come from my work dedicated to that subject,<sup>23</sup> to which I direct the reader interested in a more-detailed treatment.

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<sup>21</sup> C. Mattogno, *Curated Lies: The Auschwitz Museum's Misrepresentations, Distortions and Deceptions*, Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2016.

<sup>22</sup> C. Mattogno, *Healthcare at Auschwitz: Medical Care and Special Treatment of Registered Inmates*, Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2016 (in preparation).

<sup>23</sup> C. Mattogno, F. Deana, *The Cremation Furnaces of Auschwitz: A Technical and Historical Study*, 3 vols., Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2015.