

An Auschwitz Doctor's Eyewitness Account

The Bestselling Tall Tales of
Dr. Mengele's Assistant Analyzed

Carlo Mattogno, Miklós Nyiszli



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An Auschwitz Doctor's Eyewitness Account:

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Translated from the Italian and Hungarian by the author, by Kladderadatsch,
and by Germar Rudolf

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Cover Illustrations: top: Dr. Josef Mengele in Auschwitz (left); the only known portrait of Dr. Miklós Nyiszli (center); another wartime image of Dr. Josef Mengele (right); bottom: cover arts of various editions of Nyiszli's best-selling book.

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Introduction

In spring of 1946, the Jewish Hungarian physician Miklós Nyiszli privately published a book of memoirs entitled *Dr. Mengele boncolóorvosa voltam az auschwitz-i krematóriumban* (I Was Dr. Mengele's Forensic Pathologist in the Auschwitz Crematorium).¹ The next year this text was republished by the Budapest daily *Világ* (World) in forty-one installments between February 16 and April 6,² before being published in book form under the paper's imprint later that year.

At the beginning of 1951, extracts from this book, translated into French by Tibère Kremer, appeared in a two-part article in the French review *Les Temps Modernes* under the title “*S.S. Obersturmführer docteur Mengele: Journal d'un médecin déporté au crématorium d'Auschwitz.*”³ The complete⁴ text in French translation appeared in book form ten years later in 1961 with the title *Médecin à Auschwitz: Souvenirs d'un médecin déporté*. That same year, Nyiszli's memoir also saw the light in German translation, serialized in numbers 3-11 of the Munich magazine *Quick* under the title “*Auschwitz: Tagebuch eines Lagerarztes.*”

These publications attracted the attention of Paul Rassinier, founder of Holocaust revisionism, as well as that of his friend Albert Paraz, who alerted him to the first remarks in the French press regarding the articles in *Les Temps Modernes*. Rassinier contacted Nyiszli (see Chapter 2.3.), and he later devoted a few pages to the doctor's memoir, particularly in his books *Ulysse trahi par les siens* and *Le Drame des juifs européens*. Rassinier's criticisms, at least in part, were well founded and pertinent; they concentrated on obviously false or

¹ The various texts authored by Nyiszli are listed with all pertinent bibliographic information in the first part of the Bibliography in the Appendix.

² For details of serial publication, see György 1987, p. 294.

³ In the title of the French text “*Obersturmführer*” is spelled incorrectly, without an umlaut.

⁴ Or rather, substantially complete. The Julliard edition omits Chapter 24 of the original text.

absurd declarations by Nyiszli, but also highlighted various contradictions between the translations then available.

In the 1980s, in turn, the theme aroused my interest, and I decided to write a critical study on Nyiszli's testimony. Thus was born my book *'Medico ad Auschwitz': Anatomia di un falso*, based on the Italian translation of the 1961 French edition,⁵ but with an attentive eye on the latter as well.

The work, characterized by the late Charles D. Provan in 2001 as "a wonderful treatment, exhaustive and extremely thorough" (Provan 2001) was subdivided into two parts. The first contained the historical-critical analysis proper, broken down in the following chapters:

- I – Arrival of Nyiszli at Birkenau
- II – Geographical errors
- III – Topographical errors (Birkenau camp)
- IV – History of the Birkenau crematoria
- V – The Birkenau crematoria: furnaces and cremation capacity
- VI – Technique of the "extermination": the "gas chambers"
- VII – The "gassings"
- VIII – The end of the "gassings"
- IX – Technique of the "extermination": the pyres
- X – Balance sheet of the "extermination"
- XI – The *Sonderkommando*
- XII – Internal contradictions
- XIII – Chronological contradictions
- XIV – Chronological errors
- XV – More falsifications, errors and incongruities

The second part was a text-critical comparison of the principal translations then available, that is, the French and German versions mentioned above plus the English translation titled *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*.⁶

In the course of that comparison I uncovered more than 70 divergences and omissions of various kinds among these translations, so I concluded at last that, in order to know what Nyiszli really wrote, the only solution was to have recourse to the original text itself.

I thus dedicated myself to the study of Hungarian, procured a copy of the first edition of Nyiszli's book and translated it into Italian. During that period, I also examined other important texts, like the appendix to the 1964 Hungarian re-edition of Nyiszli's book – *Orvos voltam Auschwitzban* – and the series of articles by Nyiszli titled "*Tanú voltam Nürnbergben*" (I was a witness at Nu-

⁵ For bibliographic details on the principal editions and translations of Miklós Nyiszli's book see the third part of the Bibliography in the Appendix.

⁶ Translated by Tibère Kremer and Richard Seaver. Although it preceded the "complete" 1961 French edition published by Julliard in order of publication, this English edition is in fact a re-translation of Kremer's French version, adapted (rather freely in places) by Seaver.

remberg) which saw the light of day in the Budapest daily *Világ* (World) in 1948 and upon which I will elaborate in Chapter 2.2. of the current study.

Nyiszli's "testimony" was quickly taken up by the nascent historiography of the Holocaust as a decisive testimonial proof of the Auschwitz "gas chambers," starting with Gerald Reitlinger's 1953 *The Final Solution* (p. 151), and then appearing in other books such as Adler/Langbein/Lingens-Reiner's *Auschwitz: Zeugnisse und Berichte* (pp. 64-73), Poliakov's *Auschwitz* (pp. 46-48, 62-65), the first French edition of *The Auschwitz Album* (Freyer et al. 1983, p. 94), the collective Polish work *Auschwitz: Nazi Extermination Camp* (Rada... 1978, p. 124) and Heiner Lichtenstein's *Warum Auschwitz nicht bombardiert wurde* (pp. 78-81), to name a few.

This success was all the more strange given that Nyiszli appeared as a witness at neither the Belsen Trial (September-November 1945), nor the Tesch Trial (March 1946), nor the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg (November 1945-October 1946), nor the trial of Rudolf Höss in Warsaw (March 1947), nor the so-called Auschwitz Garrison Trial in Krakow (November-December 1947). Moreover, at those trials held after his death in 1956 – notably, the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem (April 1961-May 1962) and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (December 1963-August 1965) – Nyiszli's testimony was not accepted into evidence. On the matter of his supposed "testimony" at the I.G. Farben Trial (August 1947-July 1948) I will have more to say below (see Chapter 2.2.).

The remarkable documentation on Auschwitz published by Jean-Claude Pressac in 1989 signaled the end, in principle if not in practice, of Nyiszli as an eyewitness to the gas chambers of this camp, because despite assurances to the contrary by the French researcher (as we shall see, he held Nyiszli to be "an authentic witness"), the documents themselves resoundingly refute Nyiszli's claims. In fact, in the single chapter from Nyiszli's text which Pressac subjected to critical examination (Chapter VII), he counted at least 25 "errors" and one "multiplier" – which even he finds incomprehensible – by which Nyiszli routinely inflates numbers by a factor of four (Pressac 1989, pp. 474-475). I will return to Pressac's rather too casual commentary in Chapter 5.2.

As a matter of firmly established practice, the Auschwitz Museum authorities avoid critical analysis of any witness testimony, and Nyiszli's is no exception: they still consider it fundamental despite the grave contradictions it presents with respect to the documentation in their own possession. Indeed, at times they cover up such contradictions with an all-too-evident complicity (see Chapter 5.1.).

Other researchers, such as Raul Hilberg, do without Nyiszli's testimony almost completely; Robert Jan van Pelt limits himself to a brief reference void of significance (van Pelt 2002, p. 445).

Worthy of particular mention here is Charles D. Provan, “a revisionist who believes in the gas chambers,” as Ernst Zündel once described him, who passed away at a young age in 2007. Provan was one of the rare few who were researching Nyiszli in those days, and he made his results public in an article titled “New Light on Dr. Miklos Nyiszli and His Auschwitz Book.”⁷ I will consider him as well in Part 5 of this study.

But if, since the publication of Pressac’s work, Nyiszli’s fortunes have inevitably been in decline in relation to the gas chambers, they have risen in the eyes of other Holocaust historians, who trot him out as witness *par excellence* to the presumed nefarious crimes of Dr. Josef Mengele. The cue for this development was furnished in 1986 by Gerald L. Posner and John Ware, authors of the book *Mengele: The Complete Story*. In the second chapter of their book, “Auschwitz: May 1943-January 1945” (*ibid.*, pp. 19-58), they essentially rely on Nyiszli, citing him at least fourteen times, despite having various documents such as Dr. Mengele’s diary, autobiography and letters at their disposal (*ibid.*, p. 354).

Franciszek Piper, in a paper entitled “Gas Chambers and Crematoria” which appeared in 1994 in the anthology *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Gutman/Berenbaum 1994, pp. 157-182), mentions Nyiszli solely as a physician who performed dissections of twins at the orders of Dr. Mengele and as a witness to the presence of a gold smeltery in Crematorium II (*ibid.*, p. 168). A year later, in the third volume (“Extermination”) of the anthology *Auschwitz, 1940-1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp* (Długoborski/Piper 1995/1999/2000), Piper cited Nyiszli’s memoir a number of times, but without ever revealing the profound contradictions that exist between his claims and those of the other witnesses who remained in Auschwitz until the arrival of the Soviets (see Chapter 5.1.).

Helena Kubica, a researcher at the Auschwitz State Museum, subsequently confirmed Nyiszli’s new function as “eyewitness” to Mengele, making him a central figure of her 1997 article “*Dr. Mengele und seine Verbrechen im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau*” (“Dr. Mengele and his crimes in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp”).

This aspect of Nyiszli’s memoir, though it has become predominant over the years, interests us here only marginally, particularly because I have demonstrated elsewhere the complete documentary vacuity of the accusations laid against Dr. Mengele, promoted to the rank of “Angel of Death” for the occasion (Mattogno 2008; see the updated translation in the Appendix).

In this context, no mainstream historian has taken into consideration the following fact which, from the perspective of orthodox Holocaust historiography, should appear rather extraordinary. In the “Declaration” with which he begins his book, Nyiszli writes:

⁷ The anecdote about Zündel is related by Provan himself on p. 20 of his 2001 article.

“As chief physician of the crematoria of Auschwitz, I drew up innumerable autopsy and forensic medical reports and signed them with my tattoo number. These documents were countersigned by my superior, Dr. Mengele, and then shipped by me to the address of the Institut für rassenbiologische und anthropologische Forschungen in Berlin-Dahlem, one of the world’s most illustrious medical centers. They should still be discoverable to this day in the archives of that great research institute”

Returning to the subject in Chapter VIII, he adds:

“I sent countless such packages [i.e., of autopsy specimens] to Berlin-Dahlem during the course of my activity in the crematorium, and I received replies about them with exhaustive scientific commentary or instructions. I set up a separate dossier to keep the correspondence. In their letters to Dr. Mengele they always expressed their grateful appreciation for the rare material sent to them.”

On the basis of the descriptions in the book, it appears that Nyiszli would have performed at least 170 autopsies while at Auschwitz. The extraordinary fact, then, is simply that despite the “countless” autopsy reports written and signed by Nyiszli and the “countless” packages of biological material sent by him to the “*Institut für rassenbiologische und anthropologische Forschungen in Berlin-Dahlem*” (as he calls it in his “Declaration”),⁸ there does not exist a single piece of paper in the documentary record bearing Nyiszli’s signature!

But there is another fact, no less extraordinary, which also is continually passed over in silence by orthodox Holocaust historians. At the Belsen trial in late 1945, the Romanian Jewish physician Charles Sigismund Bendel claimed, just as Nyiszli would claim a few months later with the first publication of his book, to have been *the* doctor of the *Sonderkommando* for the Birkenau crematoria, starting, in his case, in August 1944.⁹ Since Nyiszli, according to the account in his book as we shall see, was himself at the crematoria from May 1944 to January 1945, this means that the two doctors spent at least four months together in the same place, where they presumably saw the same things and lived through the same events, yet not only are they ignorant of one another, but they produced completely contradictory testimony with regard to these matters. I will address this question in detail in Chapter 4.2.

⁸ Later on, in Chapter VIII, Nyiszli speaks of “the Institute for Racial and Developmental Biology in Berlin-Dahlem,” with “developmental” (*fejlődéstani*) replacing “anthropological” (*anthropologische*) in his translation of the German name as presented in the “Declaration.” Both names, however, are wrong: the institute in question in fact was called the *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Anthropologie, menschliche Erblehre und Eugenik* (The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics). Curiously, given his implied complicity in Mengele’s alleged crimes, Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer, director the institute from 1942 onward, was not the subject of any judicial action, Allied or German, in the postwar period.

⁹ Phillips 1949, pp. 130ff. It is not clear from Bendel’s Belsen testimony when he left the crematoria, but later statements indicate that he remained there until the evacuation of the camp on January 17, 1945. See Section 4.2.2.

A brief explanation may be in order here. After the arrival of the Soviets at Auschwitz, the prisoners remaining at the camp lived indiscriminately for more than three months beneath a propaganda bombardment from two official “investigations” – one Soviet, the other Polish – into the presumed extermination in the “gas chambers.”¹⁰ In particular, the “eyewitnesses” remaining at the camp were able not only to consult with each other, but to examine locations, ruins and even building plans and other German documents, thus absorbing the official version of events which was then developing.

On the other hand, those prisoners evacuated from the camp ahead of time took with them the propaganda stories invented by the various resistance movements of the camp, without being able to benefit from these final “updates.” This helps to explain the substantial differences which exist between the statements of the first category of prisoners – those, to be clear, who were subjected to interrogation first by the Soviets and then by Judge Jan Sehn – and the statements of the second category, in which Nyiszli and Bendel found themselves. Because the propaganda stories which circulated at Auschwitz were numerous and multifarious, and because none of them was able to impose itself as official “truth,”¹¹ each witness drew literary elements from the various strands available – a circumstance which in turn helps explain the fact that the testimonies of Nyiszli and Bendel are in complete mutual contradiction.

Very few books have struck the collective Holocaust imagination quite like Nyiszli's, as is attested to by its considerable publishing success: translations and reprints have followed one another, and continue to follow one another at an ever-increasing pace. In the Bibliography to this study, I present an overview of this publishing history, without any pretense of completeness, merely to demonstrate the amplitude of this remarkable phenomenon: apart from various re-editions of the Hungarian text, there abound translations into Italian, French, English, Dutch, Czech, Polish, Croatian, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, Arabic, Sinhalese and Romanian.

Nyiszli's book has also inspired two films, Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone* (2001) and László Nemes's *Saul fia* (Son of Saul, 2015).

With regard to translations made directly from the Hungarian original, one of the best undoubtedly is the 1992 German translation *Im Jenseits der Menschlichkeit: Ein Gerichtsmediziner in Auschwitz* (Beyond humanity: a forensic doctor in Auschwitz), which is supplemented by explanatory notes and an interesting appendix. Also worth mentioning is the 1996 Polish translation

¹⁰ The two investigations resulted, respectively, in the so-called Extraordinary State Commission report on Auschwitz, entered into evidence as Document 008-USSR (often cited as USSR-8) at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg (*IMT*, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 241-262; in German) and Polish investigating judge Jan Sehn's report (Sehn 1946). The former is available in English translation in: Soviet... 1946, pp. 283-300.

¹¹ I have presented an overview of these various literary strands in Mattogno 2018.

Bylem asystemem doktora Mengele: Wspomnienia lekarza z Oświęcimia (I was Dr. Mengele's assistant: memories of a doctor at Auschwitz), though more for the annotations by Franciszek Piper than for any fidelity to the Hungarian text.

Practically all of the more important translations of Nyiszli's book made directly from the original text contain omissions and manipulations here and there. It is not the purpose of this study to make a systematic comparison, but in the translation of the book which follows I underline certain passages omitted from the "classic" translation of Tibère Kremer.¹² Here it will suffice perhaps to mention, by way of example, a passage invariably omitted in all the translations that I've examined:¹³

"Three great men form and shape the character of the peoples of the world and ensure their future: Stalin! the genius leader of the Russian people, Roosevelt Franklin Delano, wise president of the United States, and Churchill, the British lion."

I will provide further details on this theme in Chapter 5.1.

The translations in question also allow themselves all too ample liberties in correcting, to a certain extent, Nyiszli's peculiar technical terminology, especially regarding the Birkenau crematoria. This question will be analyzed further in Section 3.2.1.

The documentation on Auschwitz has grown enormously since I published my original study of Nyiszli's book in 1988, and now allows his testimony to be evaluated in a more thorough manner.

That said, his invented "testimony" at the I.G. Farben Trial, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter 2.2., is already more than sufficient to get a quite clear and precise idea of the seriousness and reliability of this "eyewitness."

* * *

In the translation of *Dr. Mengele boncolóorvosa voltam az auschwitz-i krematóriumban* which follows, I have indicated in square brackets the original Hungarian text in various places where Nyiszli's choice of words is particularly significant, and I have also let stand the innumerable question marks and exclamation marks with which the book is littered. Nyiszli's prose abounds in elliptical expressions, which I have supplemented above all in those cases where the sense would otherwise be unclear, as well as in indeterminate subjects and sudden switches between tenses and singular and plural forms. To the extent that they do not impair comprehensibility, however, such

¹² In their French and English translations, respectively, Kremer and Seaver suppressed Nyiszli's Chapter 24 altogether; Seaver moreover merged Chapter 16 with 17 (making for 39 and 38 chapters respectively, instead of Nyiszli's 40).

¹³ Nyiszli 1946, p. 166. The various versions examined handle the passage as follows: *Médecin à Auschwitz* (1961a), p. 242, omission not indicated; *Im Jenseits der Menschlichkeit* (1992), p. 151, omission indicated with ellipsis; *Bylem asystemem doktora Mengele* (1996), p. 168, omission not indicated.

apparent “blemishes” have been faithfully reproduced in the translation below. No attempt has been made to polish Nyiszli’s text; rather the goal at all times has been to reflect its true character, both in style and content, as accurately as possible, without omission or alteration.¹⁴

Wherever linguistic explanation is required for German terminology used by Nyiszli, I refer the reader to an apposite footnote. Terms and expressions in German and Latin are reproduced in the form, sometimes erroneous, in which they appear in the original text. As an aid to recognition, however, such foreign terms are printed in italics in the translation, a practice which Nyiszli does *not* follow in his book.

The translation is provided with essential explanatory notes only; all necessary additional analysis will be presented in the later parts of this study, Part Three in particular. It will at all events be helpful for the reader to keep in mind that Nyiszli’s numbering of the Birkenau crematoria from I to IV, while not an error as such,¹⁵ differs from the more familiar practice of numbering them from II to V (reserving I as the designation for the crematorium at the Auschwitz Main Camp).

¹⁴ Translator’s remark: In preparing the English version of Nyiszli’s book below, the translator has consulted the original Hungarian text throughout to ensure that no inaccuracies creep into the translation as a result of working at a linguistic second remove. While following Mattogno’s Italian version in its strict concern for accuracy, the English version thus is not a mere retranslation, but is in effect a first-order translation in its own right, rigorously checked against the source material. The object, at all times, has been to reflect the content and character of Nyiszli’s writing as closely as possible. The same principle of consulting original texts is followed, wherever feasible, in the translation of other quoted material in later parts of the study as well.

¹⁵ After the decommissioning of the original crematorium (I) in the Auschwitz Main Camp in July 1943, the newly built Birkenau crematoria (II-V) were in practice renamed with numbers I through IV, a fact reflected in various testimonies of the immediate postwar period. Modern scholarly practice, on the other hand, generally restores the original numbering. See Nyiszli 1992, p. 164, Note 28.