

# Auschwitz: Crematorium I

and the Alleged  
Homicidal Gassings

**Carlo Mattogno**



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Cover illustrations: modern photos of: left: external view of Crematorium I at the Auschwitz Main Camp; center: morgue plus washing room in their current state; right: one of the reconstructed furnaces in the furnace hall of the crematorium; background: section of an original German blueprint of the Auschwitz Main Camp.

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## Introduction

The orthodox history of the plan for the extermination of the Jews that was allegedly implemented at Auschwitz between 1942 and 1944 begins, as is well known, with an impalpable event: the first homicidal gassing in the basement of Block 11 of Auschwitz. This deed is said to have taken place between September 3 and 5, 1941, and to have led to the death of 250 sick detainees and 600 Soviet prisoners of war. I dedicated an in-depth study to this alleged event in 1992<sup>1</sup> – published in English<sup>2</sup> and German<sup>3</sup> in a revised, corrected, and enlarged edition – in which I demonstrated that this event has no historical foundation.

Orthodox historiography affirms that, because the basement of Block 11 caused too much time to be lost in ventilation, the homicidal gassings were subsequently moved to the morgue (*Leichenhalle*) of Crematorium I, the old crematorium (*altes Krematorium*) at Auschwitz, and that this space was then equipped with a ventilation device to make it suitable for such a purpose. There is, however, no trace in the documents of any such criminal use of this facility.

Initially at least, the homicidal activity, which allegedly went on in this morgue, is said to have been of an experimental nature aiming at a refinement of the method used. As in the case of the “first gassing,” this activity rests entirely on testimony. In view of the total absence of documentary confirmation, this alleged milestone of the orthodox narrative of the camp was for decades relegated to the murky sidelines of historical research, generally dealt with in a few pages, if not a few lines of text.

In the present study, which is the logical sequel to *Auschwitz: The First Gassing*, I shall examine the topic of the alleged gassings in the morgue of Crematorium I from three converging viewpoints: the origin of the account and its development in the testimonies; the ventilation projects for Crematorium I and their implementation; and the material and documentary evidence.

The conclusions of this three-pronged approach, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, squarely contradict the assertions of orthodox historiography and lay bare the true nature of their shaky conjectures, which have no objective backing.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Mattogno, *Auschwitz: la prima gasazione*. Edizioni di Ar, Padua, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> C. Mattogno, *Auschwitz: The First Gassing. Rumor and Reality*, 3rd ed., Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2016.

<sup>3</sup> C. Mattogno, *Auschwitz: Die erste Vergasung. Gerücht und Wirklichkeit*, 2nd ed., Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2014.



## Chapter 1: The Origin of the Homicidal Gassing Story

### 1.1. The “Gas Chamber” of Crematorium I in the Reports from the Secret Resistance Movement at Auschwitz

From April 1941 onwards, various resistance groups that had sprung up among the detainees regularly sent out detailed reports on the events in the camp, which were then collected and disseminated by the Polish government in exile in London. These reports, published by the Auschwitz Museum as a book of nearly 200 pages,<sup>4</sup> refer several times to rumors relating to the first alleged gassing in the basement of Block 11 – which, however, is never mentioned<sup>5</sup> – as well as to the alleged homicidal activity in the two provisional gas chambers at Birkenau, the so-called “Bunkers” – likewise never referred to by that name.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, these reports are practically silent about homicidal gassings which allegedly went on for a good 14 months in the morgue of Crematorium I. The crematorium of the Auschwitz camp comes up for the first time in a report dated June 1942, which merely states:<sup>7</sup>

*“The bodies of those who die in the camp are taken to the crematorium, which can burn only 200 persons [corpses] per day, though; the remaining corpses are taken to Brzezinka [Birkenau] and buried in graves dug for that purpose. The corpses of those who have been gassed are also buried there.”*

The next reference to the crematorium is contained in a “letter written from the Auschwitz camp” dated August 29, 1942:<sup>8</sup>

*“Every day, two fully loaded carts, which contain some 150 persons [corpses], go to the crematorium, which has been enlarged and remodeled to absorb 200 persons [corpses] in 24 hours.”*

---

<sup>4</sup> “Obóz koncentracyjny Oświęcim w świetle akt Delegatury Rządu R.P. na Kraj” (The Auschwitz Concentration Camp in the Light of the Proceedings of the Delegatura of the Polish Government in Exile), *Żeszyty oświęcimskie*, special no. I, Wydawnictwo Państwowego Muzeum w Oświęcimiu, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 15, 16, 52, 67. Cf. C. Mattogno, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 31-36.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. in this respect my study *Debunking the Bunkers of Auschwitz: Black Propaganda versus History*, 2nd ed., Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2016.

<sup>7</sup> “Obóz koncentracyjny...,” *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 34. The last sentence refers to the alleged temporary gas chambers of Birkenau.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

The “Memorandum on the situation in the country for the period of October 11 through November 15, 1942” gives the following information:<sup>9</sup>

*“The official book of the detainees who have been burnt so far in the crematoria<sup>[10]</sup> of Auschwitz lists as of August 15 some 18,800<sup>[11]</sup> surnames of martyrs for this camp. Not mentioned in this book are the tens of thousands who are sent to Auschwitz merely for the purpose of being exterminated there immediately in the gas chambers [w komarach gazowych].”*

The only reference to the alleged gas chamber in Crematorium I appears in a report of November 1942:<sup>12</sup>

*“There are two poisoning sites: in the camp crematorium (capacity 400 persons) and at Brzezinka [Birkenau], where several considerably larger houses near the forest have been converted for this purpose.”*

Surprisingly, for the 14 months of the operation of the “gas chamber” in Crematorium I, where several tens of thousands of people are said to have perished, no detainee in the camp noted anything, and the “truth” was discovered by the resistance movement of the camp only a few weeks before such activity allegedly ended!

## 1.2. Origin and Development of the Official Version

Between February 14 and March 8, 1945, an investigative Commission consisting of the Poles R. Dawidowski and J. Doliński as well as the Soviet citizens V.F. Lavrushin and A.M. Schuer drew up a report on the “gas chambers” and the crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau, which contains the following passage on Crematorium I:<sup>13</sup>

*“In early 1941, a crematorium, designated as Crematorium #1, was started up in the Auschwitz camp. It had two furnaces with two muffles each, heated by four coke gasifiers. At the end of 1941, in September or October,<sup>[14]</sup> a third furnace with 2 muffles of the same type as the first two was set up in the same place [the furnace room]. Each muffle could accommodate 3 to 5 corpses at one time, cremation lasted one hour and a half, and the number of corpses cremated amounted to 300 to 350 per day.*

<sup>9</sup> “Obóz koncentracyjny...,” *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 56. The report is dated November 15, 1942.

<sup>10</sup> “w krematoriach;” as is well known, at that time there existed only one crematorium, the one at the Main Camp (*Stammlager*).

<sup>11</sup> The accuracy of this figure cannot be verified, because the registers of the cremations have not been preserved.

<sup>12</sup> “Obóz koncentracyjny...,” *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> GARF, 7021-108-15, pp. 2f. This report exists in a number of copies.

<sup>14</sup> The date is in error, Cf. Chapter 5.3.

*Next to this crematorium there was a gas chamber, which had, at either end, gas-tight doors with peep-holes and in the ceiling four openings with hermetic closures through which the 'Zyklon' for the killing of the persons was thrown. Crematorium I operated until March 1943 and existed in that form for two years."*

On the basis of rather fanciful assumptions (an operational period of 14 months, an activity coefficient of 0.5 and a monthly capacity of 9,000 corpses), the experts then calculated a total of 63,000 corpses as having been cremated,<sup>15</sup> but did not specify whether these were victims of the alleged gas chamber.

The description was very terse, because the Soviets had not yet found either witnesses or documents regarding the homicidal use of the crematorium. Such a use was evidently assumed on account of the three gas-tight doors (*Gasschutztüren*), which, as we shall see in Chapter 6, had been installed in late 1944, when the crematorium was converted to an "air-raid shelter for the SS hospital with operating room" (*Luftschutzbunker für SS-Revier mit einem Operationsraum*). This is confirmed by the fact that, in its original state, the morgue did in fact have two doors, but not "at either end." That was the case in the February to March 1945 period.

The serious gaps of the Soviet Commission were only partially filled a few months later by a Polish detainee, Stanisław Jankowski (see Chapter 3.1.). He created the literary basis of the story about gassings in Crematorium I, which, however, went nearly unnoticed by interrogators and historians alike.

On September 26, 1946, at the request of Jan Sehn, the investigating judge in the trial of Rudolf Höss (March 11-29, 1947) and that of the Auschwitz camp garrison (November 25 to December 16, 1947), the engineer Roman Dawidowski drew up a lengthy technical opinion on the alleged extermination installations at Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the subject of criminal activity in Crematorium I, this expert wrote:<sup>16</sup>

*"One now began to poison people regularly with Zyklon B and to use for that purpose the Leichenhalle (morgue) of Crematorium I (photograph 18).<sup>[17]</sup> This chamber had a floor area of 65 square meters – 17 by 4.5 meters<sup>[18]</sup> – and on both sides had a gas-tight door. Gassing took place by dumping the contents of Zyklon cans through openings in the ceiling."*

The opinion states furthermore that from March 1942 onwards thousands of Jews arrived at Auschwitz every day and that "the gas chamber of

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> AGK, NTN, 93; Höss trial, vol. 11, pp. 26f.

<sup>17</sup> This concerns the plan of Crematorium I, Topf D 59042, of September 25, 1941. Cf. Document 3 in the appendix.

<sup>18</sup> Calculation error:  $17 \times 4.5 = 76.5$ . The morgue measured  $17 \times 4.6 = 78.2$  m<sup>2</sup>.

Crematorium I turned out to be inadequate for their liquidation.” The alleged gassings were, therefore, moved to the so-called “Bunkers” of Birkenau.

Toward the end of 1946, Jan Sehn summarized the results of this research in a long article entitled “The Auschwitz Concentration and Extermination Camp.”<sup>19</sup> In the chapter on the “gas chambers,” he simply included the corresponding passage from Roman Dawidowski’s opinion, including the error about the floor area, and adding the mistake of the Soviet experts with respect to the position of the gas-tight doors:<sup>20</sup>

*“From there on, subsequent gassings took place in the gas chamber of Crematorium I. This chamber had a floor area of 65 square meters and a gas-tight door at either end. Gassing was effected by dumping through openings in the ceiling the contents of the cans, which gave off a toxic gas. From that time on, gassing of persons increased systematically.”*

Also in 1946, Filip Friedman, director of the “Jewish Historical Commission in Poland,” published a book on Auschwitz, “compiled from official records and evidence and eyewitness accounts,” in which he writes the following:<sup>21</sup>

*“The same year [1941] permanent gas installations were installed in two peasant huts at Brzezinki (Birkenau). The bodies of the gassed people were buried near the huts. By the spring of 1942, the bodies began to rot and smell, and steps were taken to build a crematorium in which to burn the corpses. This was the origin of the first small crematorium with a gas chamber at Oswiecim. It was, however, still only an improvisation on a small scale.”*

Thus, inverting the actual sequence of events according to orthodox historiography, he has the so-called “Bunkers” at Birkenau come into being in 1941<sup>22</sup> and makes the installation of Crematorium I a subsequent event.

The written verdict of the Höss trial (April 2, 1947) devotes less than one line to the problem of alleged homicidal gassings in Crematorium I:<sup>23</sup>

*“Gassing of detainees was introduced in the area of this camp in 1941, initially in the basement of Block 11, later in the morgue of Crematorium I [...]”*

The indictment in the trial of the Auschwitz camp garrison (November 1947) was just as laconic in this regard:<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Jan Sehn, “Obóz koncentracyjny i zagłady Oświęcim,” in: *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce*, vol. I, Poznań 1946, pp. 63-130.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>21</sup> F. Friedman, *This Was Oswiecim. The History of a Murder Camp*, The United Jewish Relief Appeal, London 1946, pp. 18f.

<sup>22</sup> According to the orthodox historiography, “Bunker 1” went into service in March or May 1942, “Bunker 2” in June 1942.

<sup>23</sup> AGK, NTN, 146z, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> RGVA, 7021-108-39, p. 37.

*“Then the gassings took place in a special chamber in Crematorium I, and later also in the so-called Bunkers 1 and 2 at Birkenau, in farmhouses, whose inhabitants had been removed.”*

In 1949, Bruno Baum, an ex-detainee of Auschwitz who had organized the German resistance group, published a book specifically dedicated to the camp resistance. As such, Baum was no doubt one of the best-informed former inmates about events in the camp, but still, regarding the alleged gassings in Crematorium I, he had nothing better to say than the few lines that follow:<sup>25</sup>

*“One day, the news spread that in the old crematorium of the Main Camp they had tried to kill detainees by means of gas. This information was soon confirmed.”*

And that is all.

When the Central Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerian Crimes in Poland published a Polish-language edition of the so-called memoirs of Rudolf Höss in 1956,<sup>26</sup> historians, who so far suffered from a lack of information about the claimed gassings in Crematorium I, had now access to the statements of the Auschwitz commandant.

Together with the “report” by Pery Broad – drawn up on July 13, 1945, then lost, later miraculously rediscovered for the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial (December 20, 1963, to August 20, 1965), but not in its original form, of which no one knows the whereabouts – the Höss paper became the keystone of the evidence concerning the claimed reality of homicidal gassings in Crematorium I and would invariably be referred to in the orthodox literature.

The year 1958 saw the publication of the German version of a book written by Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka, which had first been published in 1946. It claimed to be a detailed history of the Auschwitz camp, entitled *The Factory of Death (Die Todesfabrik)*. In the chapter dealing with “the first gassing experiments” (*die ersten Vergasungsversuche*), the authors make the following rather terse remarks:<sup>27</sup>

*“The first mass gassing of transports at Auschwitz took place in early 1942 in the only crematorium then available at the Auschwitz I concentration camp. Prior to that, physically weak detainees, mainly Russian POWs, had been killed in smaller groups by means of gas.  
The Auschwitz crematorium was small. It had a gas chamber for 600 to 800 persons and six cremation furnaces.”*

<sup>25</sup> B. Baum, *Widerstand in Auschwitz. Bericht der internationalen antifaschistischen Lagerleitung*, VVN-Verlag, Berlin-Potsdam 1949, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Central Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerian Crimes in Poland (ed.), *Wspomnienia Rudolfa Hössa komendanta obozu oświęcimskiego*, Wydawnictwo Prawnicze, Warsaw 1956.

<sup>27</sup> O. Kraus, E. Kulka, *Die Todesfabrik*, Kongress-Verlag, Berlin 1958, p. 110.

*A further victim of mass execution by gas was the transport of Slovak Jews from Zilina in May 1942. This gassing was not yet carried out in such a cunning way as was the case a few days later, after Himmler's visit.*

*Once the first test had been successful, they started building four large crematoria with gas chambers at Birkenau."*

Otherwise, Kraus and Kulka relied on Höss's declarations.<sup>28</sup> The claim about the gassing of the Slovak transport had been taken from a statement by Filip Müller (see Chapter 3.3.). The errors in the interpretation (the reason for building the Birkenau crematoria) and in the sequence of events (Himmler's visit took place in July 1942, not in May) reflect the uncertainty of the historical knowledge at the time.

Even in the 1960s, Jan Sehn, in his book on Auschwitz, deals with the question of the alleged gas chamber of Crematorium I in only a couple of lines, the same as those of his 1946 article:<sup>29</sup>

*"The mortuary (Leichenkeller)<sup>[30]</sup> of the first Oswiecim crematorium – used for gassing after the first test in Block 11 – was 65 sq. m. in area and was fitted with two gas-proof doors. Cyclon was thrown in through openings in the ceiling. From 1942 on, mass transports of Jews began to arrive at Oswiecim. The gas chamber of Crematorium I proved inadequate for their liquidation."*

In one of the first general accounts of the camp's history published by the Auschwitz Museum, the page Franciszek Piper devoted to Crematorium I is based on only one source: the "memoirs" of Rudolf Höss!<sup>31</sup>

Another testimony considered essential and immediately absorbed by orthodox historiography appeared in 1979: the author, Filip Müller, asserted he had worked for 16 months in Crematorium I at Auschwitz, from May 1942 until July 1943.<sup>32</sup>

In 1989, Danuta Czech, in the second German edition of her *Auschwitz Kalendarium*, attempted to historicize the story of gassings in Crematorium I at Auschwitz by giving precise indications regarding the beginnings of the alleged homicidal activity. The value of her entries will be examined in Chapter 4.1.

Jean-Claude Pressac was the first scholar to try to bring the vagaries of the accounts surrounding the homicidal gassings in the morgue of Crematorium I into a historical framework. In 1989 he devoted a whole chapter of

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110f.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Sehn, *Oświęcim-Brzezinka (Auschwitz-Birkenau) Concentration camp*, Wydawnictwo Prawnicze, Warsaw 1961, p. 125.

<sup>30</sup> Wrong term, properly used only for the semi-basement morgues of Crematoria II and III at Birkenau.

<sup>31</sup> F. Piper, "Extermination," in: State Museum Auschwitz (ed.), *Auschwitz (Oświęcim) Camp hitlérien d'extermination*, Editions Interpress, Warsaw 1978, p. 118.

<sup>32</sup> Filip Müller, *Sonderbehandlung. Drei Jahre in den Krematorien und Gaskammern von Auschwitz*, Verlag Steinhausen, Munich 1979; Müller's statements will be examined in Chapter 3.3.

his first book to this question, in which he attempted to demonstrate the historical reality of the homicidal gassings in Crematorium I on the basis of mere testimony.<sup>33</sup>

In his second book, which appeared four years later,<sup>34</sup> Pressac claims ambitiously to furnish documentary evidence for the use of the morgue of Crematorium I as a homicidal gas chamber. His theses will be evaluated in depth in Chapter 5.

The most penetrating – or, more precisely, the least superficial – official study of the alleged homicidal gas chamber of Crematorium I at Auschwitz is contained in the section “Krematorium I” of the chapter “The Methods of Annihilation,” written by Franciszek Piper, which is part of the most comprehensive work on this camp published by the Auschwitz Museum.<sup>35</sup> We are dealing here with a little more than ten pages of text accompanied by four pages of drawings and photographs. Two and a half pages summarizing this section had already appeared in English in 1994.<sup>36</sup>

According to this study, which represents the peak of orthodox historiography on this topic, the gas chamber operated from September 1941 until early December 1943 and was instrumental in the deaths of “several tens of thousands” of Jewish victims.<sup>37</sup>

David Irving discovered the verbatim interrogation protocol of SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Hans Aumeier by the British authorities after his arrest on June 11, 1945. Aumeier had been assigned to Auschwitz in 1942 and 1943. These documents have been cited by orthodox historians as confirmation – or “converging evidence” – of the reality of homicidal gassings in Crematorium I at Auschwitz. I shall deal with this claim in Chapter 3.4.

Before any detailed examination of the rare testimonies on the alleged homicidal activities in the morgue of Crematorium I can be undertaken, it is indispensable to establish the documentary framework of what is historically certain about this installation. Regarding the history of the cremation

<sup>33</sup> J.-C. Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and operation of the gas chambers*, The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, New York 1989. The chapter is on pp. 123-159.

<sup>34</sup> J.-C. Pressac, *Les crématoires d'Auschwitz. La machinerie du meurtre de masse*, CNRS Editions, Paris 1993; German: *Die Krematorien von Auschwitz. Die Technik des Massenmordes*, Piper, Munich, Zürich 1994. Subsequent page numbers refer to the French original.

<sup>35</sup> Waław Długoborski, Franciszek Piper (eds.), *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Węzłowe zagadnienia z dziejów obozu*. Wydawnictwo Państwowego Muzeum Oświęcim-Brzezinka, 1995, vol. III, *Zagłada*, pp. 102-113. English version: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum 2000, vol. III, pp. 121-133.

<sup>36</sup> F. Piper, “Crematorium I,” paragraph of paper “Gas Chambers and Crematoria,” in: I. Gutman, M. Berenbaum (eds.), *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1994, pp. 158-160.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

equipment, I refer the reader to the detailed discussion I have presented elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

In the following chapter, I shall mainly focus on the ventilation devices for the morgue – planned and realized – and on the changes that the crematorium went through in November 1944. In Chapter 6 I will return to this latter point when dealing with the modifications to which the crematorium was subjected by the Polish authorities in 1946 and 1947.

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<sup>38</sup> C. Mattogno, F. Deana, *The Cremation Furnaces of Auschwitz: A Technical and Historical Study*, Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield 2015, Vol. I, Part II, Chapter 6.1.