

BY JÜRGEN GRAF AND CARLO MATTOGNO

**CONCENTRATION CAMP
MAJDANEK**

A HISTORICAL & TECHNICAL STUDY

THIRD REVISED & EXPANDED EDITION

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Concentration Camp Majdanek: A Historical & Technical Study

By JÜRGEN GRAF and CARLO MATTOGNO

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ON THE COVER: Left: Exterior wall of the Majdanek disinfection facility (Barrack 41) with blue stains on the bricks indicating the use of the insecticide Zyklon B inside. Top: Front view of a mobile oil-fueled Kori cremation furnace as used in the Majdanek camp. Right: Soviet soldier on the roof of the Majdanek Drying Facility posing for a propaganda photo which was wrongly captioned: "Opening through which the substance 'Zyklon' was poured into the gas chamber." In fact, it was one of the two ventilation shafts of the drying facility. Background: A portion of the Majdanek historical site as it exists today.

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Introduction

1. Concentration Camp Lublin-Majdanek

In July 1941 the National-Socialist occupation administration decided to set up a large concentration camp near the city of Lublin. As of October of that year the camp developed in the southeastern outskirts of the city. The Poles called it “Majdanek” from the start; the name can be traced back to the city district Majdan Tatarski. Eventually the name came to be generally used, and it is also the name of choice today in academic historiography.

In time, Majdanek became by far the largest concentration camp on the territory of the General Government.¹ Non-Jewish and Jewish Polish citizens made up the bulk of the inmates, but prisoners from many other nations were also detained there, as well as a number of Soviet prisoners of war.

On July 23, 1944, Majdanek was overrun by the Red Army, which, however, discovered only some 1,500 inmates there;² the others had been evacuated to the west in the preceding months.

It was not long after the capture of the camp that the Soviets and their Polish allies began reporting about horrific mass murders which Germans had allegedly committed there. In a Lublin Special Court’s indictment of six guards who had failed to flee in time, it was averred that 1.7 million people had been murdered in Majdanek.³ At the Nuremberg Tribunal in early 1946 there was talk of 1.5 million victims.⁴

No serious student of the matter accepts these figures anymore; today they are considered unanimously to be fantastic exaggerations. But official historiography continues to hold that aside from those inmates who died of ‘natural’ causes and those who were individually tried, convicted, and then executed by shooting or hanging, there were very great numbers of (mostly Jewish) people who were murdered in Majdanek by gassing, or by execution without having been tried or convicted.

¹ Auschwitz, in Upper Silesia, was not located in the General Government, but in the area that was annexed to the German Reich after Poland’s defeat in 1939.

² This is the figure given in the Polish literature (e.g. see Anna Wiśniewska and Czesław Rajca, *Majdanek. Lubelski obóz koncentracyjny*, Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, Lublin 1996, p. 32). Gerald Reitlinger cites a higher figure, namely 6,000 (*Die Endlösung. Hitlers Versuch der Ausrottung der Juden Europas 1939-1945*, Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1983, p. 512).

³ *Sentencja wyroku. Specjalny Sad Karny w Lublinie*, December 2, 1944 (Reasons for Sentence in the Trial of Hermann Vogel *et al.*), Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku (Archive of the State Museum in Majdanek, henceforth abbreviated as *APMM*), sygn. XX-1, p. 100.

⁴ *IMT*, vol. VII, p. 590.

Let us first examine how Majdanek is represented in official western historiography, in Polish historiography, and in Revisionist historiography.

2. Majdanek in Official Western Historiography

According to official western historiography, Majdanek served concurrently as labor and extermination camp.⁵ The inmates there, it is claimed, were differentially processed by selection; those who were judged fit to work were put to forced labor, those who were unfit to work were “liquidated.” As of early fall 1942, Jews were allegedly murdered *en masse* in gas chambers, some with Zyklon B and some with carbon monoxide. Further, some 18,000 Jews were allegedly shot in Majdanek on November 3, 1943.

The well-known anthology *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas*, edited by Kogon, Langbein, and Rückerl, states:⁶

“Much like in Auschwitz – if not for quite as long and to as shockingly great an extent as there – the administration of the Majdanek concentration camp near Lublin made use of gas chambers to murder great numbers of people. As soon as these chambers had been installed, the Jews were subjected to selection upon arrival: those who appeared unfit to work were escorted off to be gassed.”

Somewhat more cautiously, but along the same lines, the *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust* states:⁷

“Some prisoners were taken to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival: in this respect Majdanek was an extermination camp.”

Since 1945 tens of thousands of books have been published about the ‘Holocaust’. The focal point of the ‘Holocaust,’ it is claimed, were six so-called ‘extermination camps’ in Poland. One would therefore expect to find veritable mountains of literature about all these ‘extermination camps’ and consequently also about Majdanek, but far from it: western historiography has completely neglected the Lublin camp. Since 1945 not one West European or American historian has been moved to author a work about Majdanek which even remotely approximated to scientific and academic standards!

Aside from the memoirs of former inmates, which are necessarily subjective and can never take the place of historical research striving for objectivity, Heiner Lichtenstein’s work *Majdanek. Reportage eines Prozesses*⁸ is the only

⁵ The German term for this – “*Vernichtungslager*” – does not appear in so much as one German war-time document. It arose from Allied terminology and is a direct translation of “extermination camp.”

⁶ E. Kogon, H. Langbein and A. Rückerl (eds.), *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas*, Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1983, p. 241.

⁷ Eberhard Jäckel, Peter Longerich and Julius H. Schoeps (eds.), *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust*, Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1993, p. 918.

⁸ Heiner Lichtenstein, *Majdanek. Reportage eines Prozesses*, Frankfurt/M: Europäische Ver-

German-language book about this camp which has achieved notable circulation. Categorically the book is in no way a scientific analysis. Lichtenstein accepts the mass extermination of human beings in Majdanek as an axiom and takes the Düsseldorf trial of former members of the camp staff (1975-1981) as an opportunity to rail in journalistic style against the National Socialist system, the defendants, their defense counsels, and the Federal German justice system, which he feels was too lax in prosecuting National Socialist offenders. Emotional outrage takes the place of sober historical inquiry in this work.

There are perhaps two main reasons for the total neglect Majdanek has experienced in western historiography:

- The almost complete domination of the ‘Holocaust’ debate by the Auschwitz camp;
- The reluctance of historians to master the Polish language, without which serious work in this field is impossible.

3. Majdanek in Polish Historiography

Since the Majdanek camp was located in Poland, it is only logical that numerous books and studies on this topic were published there. Some of the literature in question is of excellent historiographical quality – except on two vital and closely related issues, namely the number of victims of the camp and the matter of the mass extermination of inmates by gassing or shooting. As we shall see in the following, the evidence presented for these issues does not stand up to critical examination.

Aside from a few titles which have been translated into western languages, this literature is unknown outside of Poland. We shall refer to it frequently in the following.

The Polish researchers, just like the western ones, portray Majdanek as a combination labor and extermination camp. The fact that under Communist rule historiography had to adhere to political guidelines and handicaps is freely admitted in Poland today; for example, Czesław Rajca of the Majdanek Museum conceded in a 1992 publication about the number of victims of the Lublin camp that these numbers had been inflated, not only by the Soviets but also by Zdzisław Łukaszkiewicz, the author of the first historical study of Majdanek.⁹

The figure of one and a half million or even more victims of Majdanek was so incredible that it fell into disuse soon after the war. In 1948 Łukaszkiewicz

lagsanstalt, 1979.

⁹ Czesław Rajca, “Problem liczby ofiar w obozie na Majdanku,” in: *Zeszyty Majdanka* (Majdanek Periodical; henceforth abbreviated as *ZM*) XIV, 1992, p. 127-132.

spoke of 360,000 dead. Of those, some 60% “succumbed to camp death,” a euphemism for death due to epidemics, debilitation, malnutrition etc.; 25% were said to have been murdered in the gas chambers, and the remaining 15% were killed by other means (shooting, hanging, lethal injection, etc.).¹⁰

For decades, Łukaszkiwicz’s figure was considered final, but for some years now historians no longer hold to it. In his aforementioned article, Rajca suggests that approximately 235,000 people actually died in Majdanek. This figure has also been adopted by the authorities of the Majdanek Memorial.

We shall show later how the Polish historians arrived at their statistics, and we shall compare these completely untenable figures with those which we ourselves have calculated on the basis of the relevant documents.

Neglecting Majdanek is not something of which one can accuse the Polish contemporary historians – quite unlike their western colleagues. Their basic weakness is that they have not been able to shake off the fetters of doctrinal Stalinist historiography, which created a propagandistically distorted picture of the camp from the start. The Polish reductions in the victim count, first in 1948 and then again in the early 1990s, are nothing more than reluctant and utterly inadequate steps towards overcoming a historiography tied to the marionette strings of politics.

4. Majdanek in Revisionist Literature

Just like orthodox western historians, the Revisionists have completely neglected Majdanek. As of the late 1990s, this side had produced only one single German language book devoted exclusively to this camp. Its title is *Majdanek in alle Ewigkeit?* (Majdanek in All Eternity?), and it was written by Josef Gideon Burg, an anti-Zionist Jew. This work was published in 1979 against the background of the Majdanek Trial taking place at that time in Düsseldorf, and made no claims to academic status; Burg relied primarily on eyewitness accounts and newspaper articles. He accused the Zionists of misusing the tragic events in Majdanek for purposes of moral and financial blackmail of the German people, and insisted that there had been no gas chambers in that camp. Writing rebelliously in German – his mother tongue was Yiddish – he stated:¹¹

“During my stay at the Breslau training school for propagandists, where we were shown soap made from Jews and were taught the gas chamber and extermination theories, a young man there drew my attention by his courageous honesty. I

¹⁰ Zdzisław Łukaszkiwicz, “Obóz koncentracyjny i zagłady Majdanek” (The Concentration and Extermination Camp Majdanek), in: *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce* (Bulletin of the Commission to Investigate the German Crimes in Poland), v. 4 (1948), pp. 63-105.

¹¹ Josef Gideon Burg, *Majdanek in alle Ewigkeit?*, Munich: Ederer Verlag, 1979, p. 96.

later met him again during a commemorative campaign in Hildesheim. He complained that his completed form had already been returned to him twice and that he had been threatened that he would be prevented from emigrating to the United States unless he reported 'in detail' about his work in the gas chambers. R.W., now 30 years of age, told me in tears that he could not lie, not even to the detriment of goyim. He, being an orthodox believer, was forbidden to do that by the commandment of Exodus 20:16, which states: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' He told me that he had been in charge of a delousing chamber in Majdanek and later in Birkenau. Even at that time he already had trouble with his Jewish supervisors because he had refused to participate in stealing items delivered for delousing. R.W. complained that in the questionnaires he was supposed to turn lice into people and the misappropriated bundles of clothing into witnesses to the extermination."

In the structure of its argument and in its highly emotional and polemic tone, Burg's book is the Revisionist counterpart, so to speak, of Heiner Lichtenstein's. Burg also dealt partly with Majdanek in another German language book which he titled *Zionazi Zensur in der BRD*.¹²

The Revisionist side has published two studies of the alleged execution gas chambers of Majdanek. In his famous expert report of 1988, the American Fred Leuchter focused primarily on those structures in Auschwitz I and Birkenau which the standard literature calls "gas chambers," but the last section of his report also dealt with the gas chambers of Majdanek. Leuchter concluded that for reasons of construction engineering the structures in question could not have been used to gas human beings.¹³

Whereas Leuchter's conclusions with regard to Auschwitz prompted several replies, only one author – the Frenchman Jean-Claude Pressac – responded to the section of the *Leuchter Report* devoted to Majdanek.¹⁴

In the context of the discussion of the alleged 'gas chambers,' we shall refer to the portion of the *Leuchter Report* relevant to this topic, as well as to Pressac's critique of the same.

And finally, Germar Rudolf, a German, has dedicated four pages in an article about homicidal gas chambers to those allegedly operated in Majdanek.¹⁵ In his view, toxicological, chemical, and structural factors as well as the contradictory nature of the eyewitness testimony speak against the factuality of the alleged execution gassings in these facilities. We shall come back to this study later as well.

¹² Josef Gideon Burg, *Zionazi Zensur in der BRD*, Munich: Ederer Verlag, 1980.

¹³ Fred A. Leuchter, *An Engineering Report on the Alleged Gas Chambers at Auschwitz, Birkenau and Majdanek, Poland*, Toronto: Samisdat Publishers Ltd., 1988.

¹⁴ Jean-Claude Pressac, "Les carences et incohérences du rapport Leuchter," in: *Jour J*, December 12, 1988, pp. I-X.

¹⁵ Germar Rudolf and Ernst Gauss, "Die 'Gaskammern' von Auschwitz und Majdanek," in: Ernst Gauss (ed.), *Grundlagen zur Zeitgeschichte*, Grabert, Tübingen 1994, pp. 276-279.

5. The Purpose of the Present Study

As we have shown, 52 years after the war's end there still exists not one comprehensive study of the Majdanek camp – neither by the orthodox nor by the Revisionist side – that measures up to scientific and academic requirements. We intend the present volume to fill this significant gap. In doing so we shall draw on the findings of the voluminous Polish literature on this subject, but we shall also deal critically with the weaknesses inherent in this literature.

The starting point for this study was a visit to Lublin in June 1997. Naturally, the state of evidence for the alleged mass extermination of human beings and the related question of the number of Majdanek victims are the main emphasis of our work.

The fact that we have chosen the conservative title *Majdanek Concentration Camp: A Historical and Technical Study* for this work indicates that we do not in any way claim this to be a history of the entire Majdanek camp. That, incidentally, would be quite a difficult task, since unfortunately the events in the camp are poorly documented; many documents were destroyed prior to the camp's dissolution or have disappeared since. For this reason many important aspects of the history of Majdanek will remain forever unclear, unless documents which have been lost or, for whatever reason, have been kept hidden, will one day turn up. For example, the fundamental question of how many inmates were sent to the camp during its entire existence cannot be answered precisely under the conditions at hand, so that estimates must suffice for the time being.

Our book cannot reveal 'the truth about Majdanek,' but it shall help us to come a good step closer to that truth. That many a long and widely accepted idea will fall by the wayside in the process can hardly be avoided.

Carlo Mattogno assumes responsibility for chapters IV, V, VI, VIII and IX of our book. Jürgen Graf is responsible for chapters I, II, III, X, the Introduction and the Conclusion. Chapter VII was written by both authors jointly.

January 7, 1998
Carlo Mattogno
Jürgen Graf