

The Danzig Soap Case: Facts and Legends around “Professor Spanner” and the Danzig Anatomic Institute 1944–1945

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Abstract: The story of “Professor Spanner’s Soap Factory”—the alleged semi-industrial manufacturing of soap from the bodies of concentration camp inmates at the Danzig Anatomic Institute—belongs to the cycle of myths and legends that have grown up around the Holocaust. Its “core of truth” lies in the fact that, in the process of making anatomic preparations, a soapy grease originates as an inevitable by-product, and that this grease was used for cleaning purposes within the institute during the last months of the war. The alleged crime against humanity turns out to have been nothing but a tasteless misdemeanor. Moreover, no Jewish corpses were involved. Reducing the Danzig Soap case, inflated by postwar propaganda to a “prime example of Nazi German crimes,” to its real dimensions, does not make the list of the Nazi crimes significantly shorter, but more trustworthy.

Did the Germans Really Make Soap from Human Fat?

Since 1942 it has often been told that the Germans boiled the victims of the extermination camps to soap stamped with the letters “RIF,” supposedly meaning *Reines Judenfett* (pure Jewish fat). RIF, however, was nothing but an abbreviation for the agency that coordinated the distribution of fat for non-alimentary use in wartime Germany (*Reichsstelle für Industriefette*). Although widely rumored during World War II—and thereafter published as a “fact” in numerous books and newspaper articles—the “RIF-Soap Legend” was long ago refuted by the historical profession. As Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt stated 25 years ago:

Fact is that the Nazis never used the bodies of Jews, or for that matter anyone else, for the production of soap [...] The soap rumor was thoroughly investigated after the war and proved to be untrue.¹

Nevertheless, a world-wide community of “true believers” in the “Soap Legend” does exist, as hundreds of Web sites show, from Patagonia to Manitoba, from California to Siberia.²

Unwittingly, those “true believers” play the role of “useful cretins” for the likewise worldwide net of Holocaust deniers, allowing them to speak, not without good reason, of the ubiquity and topicality of the Soap Legend. Operating at the fringes of scholarship, those self-appointed “Historical Revisionists” exploit the easy debunking of the RIF Soap legend to cast doubt on the very existence of the Holocaust itself. Their preferred target is the trial of the major war criminals at Nuremberg, where soap allegations were presented at court and also mentioned in the judgment, though cautiously and most probably without considerable

effect on its tenor. On the Web site of the “Institute for Historical Research,” Mark Weber, a leading “Revisionist,” gets to the point:

Easily demonstrable falsehoods like the soap story [...] raise doubts about the entire Holocaust legend [...] and [...] the credibility of the [Nuremberg] Tribunal and other supposedly trustworthy authorities in establishing other, more fundamental aspects of the Holocaust story.³

The illogic of this reasoning is obvious: a well-documented historical event such as the Holocaust cannot be discredited by disproving a marginal topic like the alleged manufacture of soap from the victims’ bodies.

At Nuremberg documents were presented by the Soviets that seemed to prove that at the Anatomic Institute of the Danzig Medical School (*Medizinische Akademie Danzig*, today *Akademia Medyczna Gdańsk*) the Germans had not only produced dozens of kilograms of soap from human body fat, but were even about to do so on a mass scale. Prosecutor Rudenko, on February 19, 1946, stated that from February 1944 until January 1945 under professor Rudolf Spanner:

semi-industrial experiments in the production of soap from human bodies [...] were carried out [...] The samples which I now submit prove that the process of manufacturing soap was already completely worked out in the Institute of Danzig [...] Only the victorious advance of the Red Army put an end to this new crime of the Nazis.⁴

The high international reputation of the Nuremberg Tribunal as a source of justice has meant that even scholars who reject the RIF Soap allegations are convinced—or at least would not *a priori* preclude—that at Danzig the Germans did make trial runs in producing soap from human corpses, though only on a small, experimental scale.⁵ Certainly many will agree with Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer, who in 1990 stated: “It is also clear that had the war continued, the Nazis were certainly capable of turning this into another mass horror.”⁶

The Danzig soap issue is firmly established in Holocaust remembrance. For example, *Beit Lohamei Haghettaot* (The Ghetto Fighters’ House), Israel, presents at its Web site 26 pictures, “photographed in 1945” at the premises of the former Danzig Anatomic Institute, as is asserted in the captions. Every picture bears the remark: “Note: This institute carried out experiments to produce soap from human fat. The bodies of inmates were supplied by the Stutthof camp.”⁷

A popular Jewish-American Web site appears to give more detailed information, but mixes the Danzig case with the RIF soap issue:

One of the worst crimes committed by the Nazis [sic] has been in Stutthof. Professor Rudolf Spanner, an SS officer and ‘scientist’, was owner of a small soap factory located in Danzig. In 1940, he invented a process to produce soap from human fat. This ‘product’ was called R.J.S.—‘Reines Judische [sic] Fett’—which means ‘Pure Jewish Fat’. Hundreds of inmates were executed

for the ‘production’ of soap. Rudolf Spanner was very proud of his invention. Following testimonies of some survivors, he used to spend hours and hours to admire his ‘invention’. At the liberation, the Allies discovered chambers full of corpses used for the production of soap. After the war, Rudolf Spanner was not arrested and continued his ‘researchs’...⁸

Millions of students all over the world have been told something similar in Holocaust education or in World-War-II history classes, and are still learning it.

Independent of its position in the Holocaust discourse, “Professor Spanner’s Soap Factory” is deeply rooted in the collective memory of the Polish people. Since 1946/47, nearly every school child in Poland has read *Professor Spanner* by Zofia Nałkowska and the references to soap-making from human bodies at Stutthof in Tadeusz Borowski’s short stories.⁹ Until recently, museums and memorial sites all over Poland exhibited cakes of soap allegedly made by the Germans from their Polish victims.¹⁰ The Danzig soap and Professor Spanner are still used in anti-German polemics, as in the heated debate over a “Center against Expulsions” and its promoter, Erika Steinbach, president of the German Association of Expellees (*Bund der Vertriebenen*).¹¹ Stefan Bratkowski, a well-known Polish journalist, wondered in *Rzeczpospolita*, one of Poland’s leading dailies, whether Erika Steinbach’s daddy might have guarded transports of Stutthof prisoners on their way to Danzig to be boiled to soap by Professor Spanner, and whether little Erika herself was washed with this soap.¹²

What really happened at the Danzig Anatomic Institute during the last year of the war? Did the Germans there in fact make soap from human corpses? Was there already a “small soap factory?” Did the Stutthof concentration camp supply the institute with corpses? Last but not least: what role did the head of the institute, Professor Spanner, play in this affair?

Horrible Discoveries in the Spring of 1945

To trace the origins of the Danzig soap case it is necessary to go back to the last days of World War II. Immediately after the capture of Danzig by the Red Army at the end of March 1945, the newly installed Polish authorities took stock of the Germans’ estate. In mid-April 1945, Wincenty Natkański, a medical doctor, and about two weeks later, Stanisław Byczkowski, a toxicologist, inspected the premises of the Anatomic Institute, which had been abandoned by the German scientists at the end of January 1945. In the morgue and in the “maceratorium,”¹³ hundreds of corpses and body parts in various stages of decomposition were rotting away in tanks and vats. The whole premises were badly vandalized. Everywhere laboratory equipment, parts of human skeletons, chemicals, books, and papers lay scattered around, as both scientists remembered years later.¹⁴ But the most shocking discovery Natkański and Byczkowski made were pieces of a whitish or grayish mass, which former employees told them was “soap” made from human fat. Both scientists then informed the authorities, probably orally; no written report has come down to us.

On May 4, 1945, a first investigation commission, headed by the Soviet Deputy Military Governor and the Polish Mayor of Gdańsk, inspected the premises.¹⁵ Polish participants included a medical doctor, members of the Security Service UBP¹⁶ and the police, politicians, and the journalist (“propagandist”) Stanisław Strąbski. In the commission’s report “a table with two kilograms of soap” is mentioned. Without being asked, Aleksy Opiński, a former employee of the neighboring Hygienic Institute, who lived in a wooden hut on the premises, approached the commission and presented two pieces of soap, one yellow and one white, which he said had been produced in the Anatomic Institute. He told the commission about a former laboratory assistant, Zygmunt Mazur, who was said to have participated in the manufacture of this soap. The same day the UBP arrested Mazur and committed him to the Gdańsk prison.¹⁷

A Polish commission, headed by an UBP officer, took a series of photographs on the premises, on May 8, 1945, mostly in the morgue and the maceratorium. Among the members of the commission was again Stanisław Strąbski, who the same day drafted an article to be published in the first issue of the newspaper *Dziennik Bałtycki* on May 19. According to Strąbski, the discoveries at the Danzig Anatomic Institute had finally and irrefutably proven that the Germans had boiled their victims to soap, as had been rumored all over Europe during the war, but due to lack of evidence, could not be verified directly at the extermination sites.¹⁸

On May 11, the Presidium of the (Polish) Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (*Prezydium Głównej Komisji do Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce*), headed by Deputy Prime Minister Jarosław Janusz, visited the institute, first and foremost the morgue and the maceratorium. Stanisław Strąbski was again present. The next day they interrogated the witnesses Aleksy Opiński and Zygmunt Mazur. A “recipe” for the making of soap from fat remainders, dated February 15, 1944, was found. Mazur confessed to having made soap out of human fat according to this recipe and told details of the soap-making process. Back in Warsaw on May 13, Zofia Nałkowska, the vice-chairperson of the commission, a well-known writer, and left-wing member of the Provisional Parliament, began to write the short story *Profesor Spanner*, based on her Danzig experience.¹⁹ The findings of the Main Commission—that in the Anatomic Institute, under the direction of Professor Rudolf Spanner, soap was made from human fat for commercial use—were never questioned in Poland for more than 55 years. They guided all further action from the Polish side and found their way into literature, encyclopedias, and school textbooks.

On May 16 and 17, 1945, an *expert* commission—the first one—headed by the (Soviet) Chief Forensic Physician of the Second Belorussian Front and consisting of two other medical doctors, an engineer, and an UBP agent, investigated the premises and examined the corpses in the morgue and the maceratorium. A smaller Polish medical commission followed on May 18 and 19. The “soap” does not seem to have been an issue for either commission since they did not mention it in their reports. In the next days, all corpses were dissected to deter-

mine the reasons for their deaths. Shortly thereafter, in June 1945, all human remains were buried at the Holy Trinity Cemetery in the immediate vicinity of the Anatomic Institute. This cemetery, situated in the triangle of today's Aleja Zwycięstwa, Marii Skłodowskiej-Curie, and Mariana Smoluchowskiego streets, was destroyed in 1946 and transformed into a public park.²⁰

On May 28 a Soviet investigation commission, headed by the War Prosecutor of the Second Belorussian Front, interrogated Zygmunt Mazur. He repeated his statements of May 12 before the Polish Main Commission, as the records of the May 28 interrogation show. Two weeks later, on June 11 and 12, Mazur was again interrogated by the same commission. He stated that he had obtained the "recipe" for soap-making from Professor Spanner on February 15, 1944, and that he himself had made soap from human fat according to this "recipe," that he had washed himself with this soap, and that his mother had used this soap for laundry. In the beginning of July 1945, the UBP presented Zygmunt Mazur to a group of foreign journalists. He repeated his statements about making soap from human fat. His confessions were quoted in the article "The Human Soap Factory of Gdańsk" by A. Zaslavsky, which appeared in the English-language newspaper *The Soviet News* on Friday, July 13, 1945. The next day Zygmunt Mazur was already dead.²¹ The cause of death most probably was typhoid fever, which ravaged at the Gdańsk prison at that time.

The Sources

Undoubtedly the most important primary sources for this analysis are the reports of the investigation commissions from May and June 1945, and Spanner's postwar testimonies before the Denazification Court and to the Hamburg and Flensburg police. The Polish commissions' reports are at the archives of the Main Commission's successor institution, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN=Institute of National Remembrance) in Warsaw. The major findings are summarized in the appendix of Stanisław Strąbski's booklet *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu* (Soap from Human Fat), together with the names and ranks/professions of the participants.²²

The records of the examinations of Zygmunt Mazur by the Soviets (May 28, June 11, and 12, 1945) were presented at the trial of the major war criminals as Nuremberg Document USSR-197. They are in Russian and were not included in the "Blue Series."²³ The "recipe" for soap-making was presented at Nuremberg as Document USSR-196, reprinted in English translation in the "Blue Series," vol. 39, pp. 463–64 under the heading "Official Note-Paper from the Anatomic Institute in Danzig with Prescription for the Manufacture of Soap from (Human) 'Fat Remainers' Dated 15 February 1944." The word "human" is not in the German original.

In 1945/46, the British undertook investigations "In the Matter of German War Crimes and in the Matter of the Anatomy Institute Danzig." They examined five former prisoners of war who, for a certain time, had worked at the Anatomic Institute: Lance Bombardier John Graham, Corporal William Anderson Neely, Sergeant Andrew Neil, Regular Bombardier Jack Sherriff, and Private John

Henry Witton. Their affidavits are kept at the Public Record Office, Kew, under file WO 311/275. Those of Witton and Neely were presented at Nuremberg as Documents USSR-264 and USSR-272, but are not included in the "Blue Series."

In 1947/48, Rudolf Spanner was interrogated by the German criminal police in the matter of the Danzig Anatomic Institute. He also testified in 1946 before the Denazification Court. Records of his statements and of testimonies given by colleagues and former students are at the Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesarchiv in Kiel, with copies at the archives of the Zentrale Stelle, Ludwigsburg, and the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich. The personal files of Spanner and Mazur from the Danzig Medical School are at the Archiwum Państwowe in Gdańsk, Poland. Some important documents from Spanner's file are reproduced in facsimile in the book *Zbrodnia na Via Mercatorum*.²⁴

Photographs of the premises of the Anatomic Institute taken in May and June 1945 by the Polish and Soviet investigation commissions have been widely published, often under titles such as "The Danzig Soap Factory," or as allegedly taken at the Stutthof concentration camp. Several are included in *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, with a list of photographers, witnesses, dates, and locations in the appendix. Photographs are also posted on the Web site of Beit Lohamei Hagethaot, but without certifications of authenticity or identifying names of photographers, dates, and places.²⁵

Far more important for the public and scholarly discussions than these primary sources, however, have been two secondary ones: the statement of the Soviet prosecutor General R. A. Rudenko at Nuremberg on February 19, 1946,²⁶ and the short story *Profesor Spanner* by Zofia Nałkowska, first published in 1945 and reissued in 1946 together with seven other short stories about German war crimes in Poland in the small booklet *Medaliony*. Rudenko based his argument solely on the records of the examinations of Zygmunt Mazur (USSR-197), the "recipe" mentioned therein (USSR-196), and the statements of the former British POWs Witton (USSR-264) and Neely (USSR-272). In addition, he presented pieces of "soap" found at the Danzig Anatomic Institute (USSR-393).

Medaliony has seen numerous reprints and was translated into all languages of the former Eastern Bloc, including German. A complete English translation, however, did not appear until 2000.²⁷ *Profesor Spanner* recounts the investigations of the Main Commission in the matter of the "Danzig Soap," focusing on the examination of Zygmunt Mazur, the main witness, on May 12, 1945. The story corresponds largely to that of Strąbski's *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*²⁸ and with the records of the later examinations of Mazur by the Soviet commission. Zofia Nałkowska's high reputation as a writer, which she had already achieved in the prewar years, her long-standing political commitment to socialism, and the fact that she personally participated as the deputy chair of the Main Commission in its investigations at the Danzig Anatomic Institute, raised *Profesor Spanner* in the public perception to the level of a first-rate historical source.²⁹

First Critical Glances at the Sources

Although critical examination of sources is fundamental to historical research, little substantiated criticism of the above primary and secondary sources has been published. Most critics have focused on the records of the examination of Zygmunt Mazur. Already Strąbski noted inconsistencies, omissions, and contradictions in Mazur's statements before the Main Commission. Being firmly convinced, however, that soap was produced in Professor Spanner's institute from human bodies with the aim of developing a method for mass production, Strąbski interpreted Mazur's odd behavior as an attempt to hide a far more terrible secret.³⁰

The "Revisionists" Richard Harwood and Dietlieb Felderer attacked the "recipe" USSR-196,³¹ but they did not realize that the soap-making instructions they cited from a popular chemistry book in order to prove the USSR-196 document wrong, refers to a different kind of process. The scathing critique of the retired chemical engineer Robert Frenz, who posted his analysis of the "recipe" and Mazur's statements on a "revisionist" Web site,³² does stand up to scientific scrutiny, but generally "revisionist" critics do not bother about details. They usually limit themselves to a wholesale refusal, mostly combined with a sweeping blow against all evidence for the Holocaust.³³ They only ridicule the Nuremberg evidence.³⁴ Neither approach can be taken seriously.

Spanner's statements in his interrogations by the German Criminal Police or before the Denazification Court in 1946–48 must be regarded with skepticism. It can be assumed that, as the accused, he tried to present himself in a favorable light and avoid saying things that might incriminate him. On the other hand, those of Spanner's statements that were neutral or might even have been used against him should be taken seriously, especially if they are corroborated by the testimony of Hans Havliček, a Czech anatomist and victim of Nazi persecution.

The first widely known non-"revisionist" critique of the documents presented at Nuremberg in the "Danzig Soap" issue came in the 1990s from the newly established United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. In a position paper that interested parties can request, the USHMM scholars point to the fact that the "recipe" USSR-196 does not refer to *human* fat. With regard to USSR-264 and 272, they further note that "the reported testimony of two British prisoners of war who worked at the Danzig Anatomical Institute while imprisoned is contradictory and inconclusive." In general, however, they take a cautious stance on the Danzig Soap issue.³⁵

The best substantiated non-"revisionist" critical approach to the "Danzig Soap Case" hitherto known is a series of articles by the Polish journalist Tadeusz Skutnik, based on archival research in Gdańsk and published in the beginning of 2000 in the regional daily newspaper *Dziennik Bałtycki* under the heading "Accusing/Defending Professor Spanner."³⁶ Skutnik reproaches the investigation commissions of May/June 1945 for an anti-German bias, which led them to misinterpret their findings. He suspects—with good reason—that Zygmunt Mazur, the main witness, was prepared for "confession" by the Polish UBP and

the Soviet NKVD. He further reminds us that Nałkowska's *oeuvre* is a work of literary fiction, which must not be treated as a historic source beyond any suspicion. His view is shared by three professors of the Akademia Medyczna Gdańsk, Bolesław Rutkowski (Nephrology and Transplantation), Janusz Moryś (Anatomy and Neurobiology), and Marek Grzybiak (Clinical Anatomy), who agree that Spanner only prepared skeletons for educational purposes,³⁷ in the course of which a soap-like by-product appeared that never was the objective of Spanner's efforts. Six decades after the end of World War II, Gdańsk/Danzig—and not least its Medical School rich in tradition—wants to rid itself of the stigma of having been the scene of “one of the worst crimes committed by the Nazis.”

Triggered by Skutnik's articles and the ensuing discussion in the local press, the Union of the German Minority in Gdańsk on December 3, 2001 asked the IPN to settle the question once and for all whether soap was made from Nazi victims in Professor Spanner's institute. IPN's interim report of September 2005 dismissed the (exonerating) German evidence as “storytelling.” It held that the (incriminating) evidence presented by the British POWs “can be trusted.” IPN concluded that soap for cleaning purposes was intentionally produced at the institute from human corpse fat. Contrary to widely held opinion in Poland, however, IPN clearly stated that the institute was not involved in genocide and that there was no mass production: “It was kind of an experiment—disgusting, immoral [...] But certainly it was not a matter of genocide with the aim of producing soap.”³⁸

A New Critical Approach

Source criticism, until now, has not yet taken into consideration that none of the witnesses who were examined by the Polish Main Commission and not a single member of that Commission was an expert in the fields of anatomy or chemistry, let alone in soap-making.³⁹ The same holds for the British witnesses and the members of the Soviet commission that interrogated Zygmunt Mazur. Moreover, none of these commissions took notice of the findings of other commissions that did forensic investigations as of May 16, 1945. The whole discussion about the case has revolved around statements given and papers written by individuals with no expertise in the field of the issue about which they expressed their views.

A second aspect, also neglected in the discussion thus far, is the political, economic, and technological framework within which Spanner and the Danzig Anatomic Institute operated during the last year of the war. Academia long ago has abandoned the Soviet-Marxist view that saw National Socialism as the culmination of capitalist imperialism, a perspective that guided the investigation commissions of 1945 and the Soviet prosecution at Nuremberg. Scholars today look at the German war economy, its structure, and its priorities in a differentiated, more realistic way. Should the Germans not have preferred making glycerin for explosives or lubricants for combat vehicles from human fat, as British World-War-I propaganda had once claimed? Wars are won with tanks and ammunition, not with soap. Did they need to develop a process for soap-making from human fat at all?

The remainder of this analysis will therefore analyze the key statements, claims, and allegations in the primary and secondary sources. In fact, wishful thinking and lack of expertise led the key commissions to misinterpret their discoveries, which in itself gave rise to further distortions of the facts and events in the literature that followed. It should also be kept in mind that the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland was a *political* body. Its duty was to document the crimes perpetrated by the Germans against the Polish people. It was in the interest of the Main Commission and, indeed, of the fledgling Polish provisional government, to portray the Germans in as negative a light as possible. At the Danzig Anatomic Institute the members of the Commission saw what they wanted to see, and they heard from the witnesses what they wanted to hear. Their view of Professor Spanner and his institute, exemplified by Commission member Zofia Nałkowska in *Medaliony*, “made history.”⁴⁰

Soap, Fat, and Chemical Maceration

Soap was a scarce commodity (*Mangelware*) in Germany and German-occupied countries during World War II. It was the main washing agent at that time and the only agent that was used for personal hygiene. Rationing, together with allotting far smaller quotas and only soap of minor quality to non-Germans, guaranteed that Germans, though forced to conserve, were never really short of soap. There is no evidence presented either at the time or since to support the notion that the Germans were sufficiently short of soap or the raw materials to make it, to have had cause to consider human fat as a raw material for its production. Obviously this fact was not known to the members of the Main Commission, who remembered the marked shortage of soap in occupied Poland and most probably generalized from their experience.⁴¹

Soap can be produced from every fat, vegetable or animal, and of course also from human fat, which in its composition does not differ principally from the fat of land mammals and would not pose additional difficulties to any process of soap-making.⁴² “Fat” is a mixture of chemical compounds of glycerin and fatty acids, and “soap” mainly consists of sodium or potassium salts of those fatty acids.⁴³ In the classical process of soap-making, known in principle in Europe since the late Roman period and used still today by hobby soap-makers and small-scale soap-boilers, the fat is mixed with a 25–35 percent aqueous solution of sodium hydroxide to obtain “hard” soap, or potassium hydroxide, which yields “soft” soap. The alkali hydroxide reacts with the fat molecules yielding alkali salts of fatty acids, the essential components of every soap. Several stages of separating, cleaning, and conditioning are still necessary until a soap ready for use is obtained.⁴⁴ The method of soap-making as described in the “recipe” USSR-196 is a primitive version of this classical process.

In the early 1930s, however, German chemical plants had already gone over to another method, in principle known since the middle of the nineteenth century, which allowed mass production on a high quality level and was better suited for

an industry with a broad product spectrum.⁴⁵ In a first step, under high pressure and with the aid of metal oxide catalysts, the fat molecules are hydrolytically split into glycerin and fatty acids. Both are the source material for a broad variety of synthetic products—among others soap—which in this production line is obtained by saponification of fatty acids with alkali hydroxides or carbonates.⁴⁶

At Spanner's time, the German chemical industry and its engineers were among the leaders in the field. They had long ago acquired the know-how necessary to make soap on an industrial scale. They did not need a "layperson," a professor of anatomy, to "invent the wheel," especially if this "invention" was generally known since the times of Galenus (ca. 130–200 A. D.). Had the Russian and Polish investigation commissions and all those who followed their conclusions taken into account these basic facts, they would never have presumed that at Spanner's institute a "process [...] was [...] worked out" for "the industrial fabrication of soap"—as was stated at Nuremberg⁴⁷—be it from human or any other fat.

But there was this "half-finished and [...] finished soap" that General Rudenko had presented at Nuremberg as Exhibit USSR-393.⁴⁸ If it really was found at the Danzig Anatomic Institute—and we should accept this as a fact—where had it come from? All witnesses testified that they saw the "soap" in the "suspicious" small brick building that was built in 1942 on the premises of the institute and that still today is called "the Maceratorium," although for decades it has no longer been used for this purpose. From the beginning of 1944, parts of human corpses, especially whole limbs, were "macerated" here, that is, boiled down in heated tanks with alkali hydroxides for obtaining skeleton preparations, as Spanner had testified in all postwar interrogations.⁴⁹ Evidence taken by the first commission, which inspected the maceratorium on May 4, 1945, corroborates this. The commission noticed, "In the one-story building [...] two autoclaves for the boiling down of human bones."⁵⁰ In one of them there were still human body parts. It should be noted that the autoclaves—heated tanks—were too small for housing a complete human body, a fact that can easily be seen from the pictures of the interior of the maceratorium, which were taken on May 8, 1945, and which have been widely published, often under the misleading heading "Professor Spanner's Soap Factory."⁵¹

About "chemical" maceration with alkali hydroxides we read in a paper presented in 2002 at a scientific congress on sea mammals:

Potassium hydroxide [...] should be used at 0.5–1% by weight and kept at approximately 110°F [about 45°C]. With the proper heat source, the specimen can be left to macerate. A well-fleshed specimen can be degreased and void of flesh in three to five days [...] Potassium hydroxide slowly decomposes cartilage, therefore sternebrae, intervertebral disks, and flipper ends are easily preserved [...] Pros: One step cleaning, degreasing and bleaching, quick, inexpensive after initial investment. Cons: Requires chemical-resistant tank, heat source.⁵²

The same method was used 60 years ago at the Danzig Anatomic Institute. Instead of potassium hydroxide, often the cheaper sodium hydroxide was used, which

works principally in the same way. In addition to skeletons, Spanner prepared various internal organs which had been treated before with Plastoid®, a vinyl ester. They were also chemically macerated in the autoclaves to obtain a casting of their vessel system.⁵³

The good preservation of cartilage makes chemical maceration with alkali hydroxides the method of choice for the manufacture of movable joint preparations, a field in which Spanner did quite a lot of research during the war. These joint preparations were to be used as visual aids in the operating room by the surgeon during difficult operations.⁵⁴ Taking into account that the number of heavily wounded soldiers at the fronts and civilians in the bombed cities who needed immediate surgery increased faster than the number of experienced surgeons, the development of such visual aids was, in fact, a matter of importance and may explain the funding of the maceratorium in wartime as well as the interest shown in Spanner's work by high-ranking Reich dignitaries. Wishful thinking, however, let the Soviets interpret this as interest in "the work for the production of soap from human bodies" shown by "Hitler's Government."⁵⁵

In the process of maceration, the fat contained in the body parts, especially in the long bones of the limbs, reacts with the alkali hydroxides yielding alkali salts of fatty acids, *vulgo* "soap." When maceration is complete, the heat source is switched off. A layer of a greasy mass, about three to four inches thick, which later becomes hard (if sodium hydroxide was used for maceration) appears at the surface of the liquid in the tanks after cooling down.⁵⁶ Here we have the "half-finished soap," which the Soviet prosecutor presented at the Nuremberg trial. Dependent on the raw material, this mass may have had a "bad smell," as some witnesses testified, or not, as others asserted. Various "inputs" may also explain the various colors (yellow, white, gray) reported by different witnesses. The soap content made this "maceration grease" suitable for simple cleaning purposes—a detergent certainly of low quality, but probably not much worse than the *Einheitsseife* distributed toward the end of the war. By further processing, a refined product, "finished soap," could in principle be obtained from it.

The Testimonies of the Eyewitnesses: Neely, Witton, Mazur

There are three witnesses who were employed at the Anatomic Institute and whose testimonies are generally accessible as Nuremberg Documents: two former British prisoners of war, John Henry Witton,⁵⁷ and William Anderson Neely,⁵⁸ and the former laboratory assistant, Zygmunt Mazur.⁵⁹ Other individuals who appear as witnesses in the sources or in the literature either had knowledge only from hearsay, like Aleksy Opiński, John Graham, Andrew Neil, and Nałkowska's two anonymous old German gentlemen in black coats,⁶⁰ or they arrived weeks after the German scientists had left the building, such as Wincenty Natkański, Stanisław Byczkowski, or the recently discovered Waław Bernard.⁶¹

Both Witton and Neely testified at the beginning of January 1946, about one-and-a-half years after they were transferred from Danzig. They had been

employed as unskilled workers with maintenance and repair jobs and with the transport of corpses within the institute. They had access to the maceratorium, but did not participate in the work that was done there. Neither of them had training in anatomy or chemistry. Both roughly describe the maceration process in a way that can be expected from someone remembering a strange, but not fully understood experience. Neely, in addition, spoke of a separate treatment of “the fatty portions of the corpses,” which according to his statement, were treated with “some acid” in “a crude enamel tank heated by a couple of Bunsen burners.”⁶² It seems, however, that this observation rather referred to the maceration of internal organs previously injected with “Plastoid.” Both witnesses agreed that from the “tanks” a certain substance (“soap”) finally was obtained, which after cooling was cut into blocks and used for cleaning purposes in the institute.

A glance at the testimonies of the five British witnesses in chronological order reveals a “cumulative enrichment with soap”: the later the witness testified, the more he told about “soap-making.” This gives rise to the suspicion that the context of the interrogations influenced the memory of the witnesses.⁶³ Undoubtedly the British and the Soviet investigators closely cooperated in the Danzig soap case, and it is certainly no accident that the two “most enriched” British testimonies appeared as Soviet evidence at Nuremberg.

The testimony of Zygmunt Mazur, the principal witness for the Soviet and Polish commissions that investigated the “Danzig Soap Case,” is the most detailed. Mazur was born on December 25, 1920, into a family active among the Polish minority of Danzig.⁶⁴ He finished the Polish *Gymnasium* with the *mala matura* exam shortly before the war, but—as a Pole—could not continue his education under German rule. He was employed at the institute as a laboratory worker (*Laborarbeiter*) from January 17, 1941, and received on-the-job training in the preparation of corpses. On February 1, 1944, he was promoted to laboratory assistant (*Laborant*) and became *Angestellter im Öffentlichen Dienst* (German civil servant).⁶⁵ When the German scientists left the institute at the end of January 1945 for the Reich’s interior, he stayed in Danzig.⁶⁶

Mazur’s testimony contains various inconsistencies, and even contradictions—a fact that already irritated Strąbski, who rightfully accused Mazur of “lying,”⁶⁷ but who was unable to find out in which regard, and why. A critical analysis of Mazur’s description of the “soap-making” given in USSR-197 provides an answer. It is possible to discern in it two completely different processes of soap-making that were combined into one story.

Mazur’s report begins with the master narrative: a primitive soap-boiling according to the prescription in the “recipe” USSR-196. It is highly doubtful that Mazur produced soap in this way, contrary to his own “confession” that he did so. First, we are led to believe that “fat” from a corpse can simply be tossed into the boiling pot. But from a corpse no “fat” can be excised, only fatty tissue, which first must be chopped into small pieces to increase its surface area. After that the fat can be extracted, either by melting (as is done in making lard from

bacon fat), or by a fat solvent (as is preferred in industry). These two indispensable steps are not mentioned in any of Mazur's testimonies. Obviously, lack of expertise on the part of their members prevented the investigation commissions from noticing this lacuna.

Second, the recipe itself has several flaws. It should have worked in principle, although a chemical calculation shows that the soap produced in this way would have had a surplus of non-neutralized sodium hydroxide, which would have made it unsuitable for human use (and which raises doubts about Mazur's statement that he had used it for washing himself). Another calculation shows that the amount of table salt ("a handful") to be added after boiling is far too low to make the soap phase separate from the aqueous phase. Here again, lack of expertise prevented the commissions from noticing these flaws.

In addition, the wording of the "recipe" raises questions whether it was indeed written by the medical technician Gertrud Koytek, who had attended a two-year vocational school and therefore had at least a basic knowledge of chemistry.⁶⁸ The circumstances of the "discovery" of the "recipe" are equally suspect: Mazur pulled it out from one of the autoclaves in the maceratorium when he was interrogated by the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland.⁶⁹ There is good reason to suspect that this recipe was forged by the Soviet NKVD or its Polish counterpart, the UBP,⁷⁰ and that the forgers were likewise not experts in chemistry.

At the end of his description of the soap-making according to the "recipe," Mazur switches to another narrative: the origin of "soap" in the maceration process: "One productive boiling took several days, from three to seven days."⁷¹ This period of time matches the amount mentioned in the paper of the sea mammal experts ("three to five days"). It contradicts what Mazur said a few lines earlier, and which is part of the "recipe" narrative: twice two to three hours, and some time for cooling, altogether not more than five to seven hours.

Mazur further stated that from 70–80 kilograms of "human fat" that were collected from about 40 corpses, about 25 kilograms of soap were obtained.⁷² A simple calculation shows that the output, according to the "recipe," should have been at least 100 kilograms of soap ready for use.⁷³ A laboratory assistant who allegedly participated in the soap-boiling only four months prior should not make mistakes in a magnitude of a factor of four. The contradiction disappears, however, if we see the reported output as belonging to the second, the "maceration" narrative. The limbs of a "well-fed" (not obese) human being⁷⁴ contain about 400 grams of fat. This would yield 600 grams of "soap" when the limbs are macerated. Multiplied by the number of corpses, 40, we arrive at the reported output of "about 25 kilograms."

Finally, in Mazur's description of the soap-making according to the "recipe," an error of fact already points to the maceration process. Mazur stated that after boiling the "human fat" with water and caustic soda and leaving the mixture to cool, "the soap floats to the surface."⁷⁵ This, however, will not occur for two

reasons. First, at this stage of the process, the soap is still dispersed within the water. Second, soap has a specific weight greater than water. (A piece of ordinary household soap sinks to the bottom of a bathtub.) Therefore, soap-boilers in a second step add plenty of common salt, which drives the soap out of the solution and, in addition, yields a brine the specific weight of which is greater than that of soap. Only at that stage of the process can the soap float to the surface. In the maceration process, however, a mixture of fat and soap originates that has a specific weight less than water, so that it will indeed float to the surface.

Having shown that Mazur could not have boiled soap according to the “recipe” USSR-196, there remains only one conclusion from the testimonies of the three eyewitnesses: the “soap” that they saw “manufactured” at the institute was nothing but the “maceration grease.”

An open question still remains. Why did Zygmunt Mazur not tell the truth about the “soap-making?” Why did he accuse himself of having perpetrated a horrendous crime in the eyes of his persecutors? We do not know and most probably we will never know. But we know that he was accused of having collaborated with the enemy, the Germans, in perpetrating a grave crime against his own, the Polish people. What is more, in the eyes of the Poles he had betrayed his nation. He had enrolled in the *Deutsche Volksliste* (German People’s List)⁷⁶ to obtain German citizenship, a necessary condition to become a civil servant. In postwar Poland, having enrolled in the German People’s List, however, was considered a severe crime, punishable by “committal to a place of isolation (camp) for unlimited time, subjection to forced labor, forfeiture of civil rights forever, as well as complete confiscation of property.”⁷⁷ Zygmunt Mazur was in a difficult position. Interrogated by the security forces, NKVD and UBP, he would have been neither the first nor the last in those years to “confess” crimes never committed. His early death prevented further inquiries. It came just at the right time.

Spanner’s Confession: Human Soap Was Indeed Made at the Institute

Already in November 1945, Spanner was confronted with the “Danzig Soap Allegations” at Kiel University. In an affidavit of November 9, 1945, he admitted that he had used *menschliche Fettseife* (human fatty soap) for treating the ligaments of the movable joint preparations for conservation and to make them supple.⁷⁸ At least twice, in May 1947 and in February 1948, Spanner was reported to the police. On May 13, 1947, he was summoned to the Hamburg criminal police and taken into custody, being suspected of “having committed a crime against humanity and of acting as an accessory to repeated murder.” He was twice interrogated, on May 13 and 14, 1947. Obviously the accusations turned out to be unfounded, because already on May 17, 1947 the Hamburg District Court ordered Spanner’s release.⁷⁹ On February 12, 1948, Spanner was interrogated by the Flensburg criminal police on the same matter. On July 21, 1948, the investigations were abandoned and the file closed because the authorities could not find a punishable offence.

In all these interrogations, Spanner admitted that he had used “human fatty soap” for impregnating the ligaments of the movable joint preparations. He gave his most precise statement on May 14, 1947, at the Hamburg District Court:

I repeat my statement given at the police and add: At the Danzig Anatomic Institute soap was manufactured to a limited extent from human fat. This soap was only used for the manufacturing of joint preparations.⁸⁰

Spanner’s confession leaves no room for doubts: at the institute soap was made from human fat. No DNA analysis, no gas chromatography of suspected probes—as sometimes is proposed⁸¹—will be necessary.⁸²

Spanner did not tell—and obviously was not asked—how this “soap from human fat” was manufactured. The easiest way was to refine the maceration grease, Soviet prosecutor Rudenko’s “unfinished soap.” As no witness mentions the refining process in his testimony, we may assume that, indeed, only a small quantity of “finished soap” was produced, unnoticed by the witnesses. Whether it was exclusively used for joint preparations, as Spanner stated, may rightfully be questioned. Some of this “finished soap” obviously was presented at Nuremberg. Samples were also analyzed at the Cracow Institute of Forensic Medicine and the Łódź State Hygiene Institute, where they were proven to be “soap” as understood in chemistry.⁸³

The Delivering of Corpses to the Anatomic Institute

The Main Commission held that Spanner had more corpses delivered to and stored in his institute than were necessary for scientific and educational purposes.⁸⁴ In public perception this is taken as proof that these corpses were meant for soap-making.⁸⁵ Commission member Zofia Nałkowska wrote of “about 350 corpses” that were found on the premises. The commission of forensic experts of May 16 and 17, 1945, however, reported precise figures:

Found 148 corpses (18 women, 4 children, 126 men and 1 ape corpse), 82 corpses without heads (two female ones) [...] Aside from the corpses, 89 severed human heads found.⁸⁶

This concurs with Spanner’s testimony from February 12, 1948 (“maybe a little more than 150”)⁸⁷ and with the capacity of the morgue, which can be calculated from the figures given in the records of the commissions of May 4 and 8, 1945 (about 150 corpses).⁸⁸ Nałkowska most probably had added all figures given for heads and bodies, which yields 320. Comparison with other medical schools shows that for 450 students of general medicine and 100 students of a course in surgery, who were expected every year at Danzig, the number of corpses was not at all exaggerated.⁸⁹ Again lack of expertise in anatomy, this time aggravated by a calculating error, led the Main Commission to a wrong conclusion.

Spanner had two main sources of corpses: the insane asylum of Conradstein (Kocborowo), and the prisons of Elbing (Elbląg), Königsberg (Kaliningrad), and

Danzig. Conradstein delivered complete corpses, while the prisons delivered beheaded corpses from execution by guillotining.⁹⁰ In the beginning, Spanner received also corpses of homeless persons from the Danzig-West Prussian region.⁹¹ He also once obtained several Poles executed by shooting, but refused to accept such corpses in the future, because they could not be properly preserved due to the shot wounds. It also seems plausible that Spanner did not get the permission of the authorities to accept "Russians,"⁹² who as a rule were quartered in *Ostarbeiter* or POW camps, for fear of bringing in contagious diseases,⁹³ which the Germans dreaded. Once he received two or four⁹⁴ "Russian" corpses from the Stutthof concentration camp. But, as he stated unchallenged, he refused to further accept corpses from Stutthof prisoners, because "the material could not be used by the students due to the complete atrophy of fatty tissue and muscles."⁹⁵

Because of the many claims that Jews, specifically, were used for soap, let us take a closer look at the nationalities of the individuals whose corpses were delivered to the institute during the period in question, that is, from February 1944 on. As the morgue diary was lost, we can only guess the nationalities from the places where the corpses came from. At Conradstein, there were no more Jews, as all Jews who had been living in insane asylums in occupied Poland had been killed long ago. The inmates were Poles and ethnic Germans (*Völkdeutsche*).⁹⁶ Determination of their nationality is difficult even if official documents are preserved, because in the Danzig-West Prussian region a considerable part of the population was of mixed Polish-German origin. The boundaries of nationality were blurred, and the classification of an individual according to nationality often changed with the political situation.

The beheaded were victims of Nazi justice who had been sentenced to death by a court. In their vast majority, they must have been German nationals, because long since, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, and Gypsy suspects were directly handed over to the Gestapo,⁹⁷ which used to kill by beating, shooting, or hanging. Among the guillotined there were also Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS soldiers.⁹⁸ Among the latter there could have been also foreign nationals who, however, had automatically obtained German citizenship upon enlisting.

We can therefore exclude that in 1944/45 Jewish corpses were delivered to the institute. This concurs with Yehuda Bauer's remark about the "laboratory" at the Danzig Anatomic Institute: "It did not involve Jewish bodies."⁹⁹ We can further conclude that, apart from a few "Russian" Stutthof prisoners, only Polish and German corpses were delivered to the institute,¹⁰⁰ none of them from Stutthof, and that the majority were from (ethnic or Reich) Germans. This tallies with Spanner's statement: "The material consisted mainly of Germans, among whom, of course, there could have been also Poles who were Germanized."¹⁰¹ The widely held opinion, particularly in Poland and among Jewish organizations, that Stutthof was the main (or even the sole) supplier of corpses for Spanner's institute and that the "soap" was made from the corpses of Polish or Jewish¹⁰² Stutthof prisoners, is not supported by the facts.

Rudolf Maria Spanner: An “Arch-Criminal” or “A Looter of Corpses?”

Against commonly held belief, Spanner was neither a member of the SS¹⁰³ nor of the SA. Proof is his party membership file.¹⁰⁴ The widely known picture that allegedly shows him in SA uniform¹⁰⁵ actually shows him in the uniform of the National Socialist Physicians’ Union (*NS-Arztbund*), which can easily be seen from the staff of Aesculapius on the collar patch. He was also a member of the National Socialist University Lecturers’ Union (*NS-Dozentenbund*) and two mass organizations open also to non-members of the NSDAP: the National Socialist Automobilists’ Corps (NSKK) and the National Socialist People’s Welfare Organization (NSV).

Spanner was certified in an official assessment to be “a party comrade of extraordinary activity in realizing the aims of the National-Socialist state.”¹⁰⁶ This should not be misinterpreted. Similar phrases were common at that time in all assessments written for promotion. Far more significant is the date of Spanner’s application for party membership: May 1933. It reveals him as a typical “Violet of May” (*Maiveilchen*), as the “Old Fighters” of the party contemptuously called those individuals who rushed into the party for career reasons after the Nazi seizure of power. He was not admitted until August 1936 and never held a position in the party. Spanner’s personal file suggests that he was a fellow traveler and careerist rather than an ardent Nazi. The Denazification Court consequently classified him as *entlastet* (exonerated).¹⁰⁷

Although Spanner claimed in his postwar interrogations that “human soap” was not used for purposes other than impregnating ligaments of joint preparations, there is little reason to doubt the testimonies, given independently by numerous witnesses, that the soapy “maceration grease,” maybe even the “finished soap,” was used for cleaning the dissection tables and the floors within the institute in the last period of the war, and it is difficult to believe that Spanner should not have known about it. In any case, as head of the institute he bore the full responsibility for everything that happened there. W. A. Neely, one of the British witnesses, related that, as far as he knew, “none of the soap was used outside the institute.” One cannot exclude, however, the possibility that personnel from the institute took some of this “soap” and even exchanged it on the black market for food or other goods, as reported by some witnesses.¹⁰⁸

Spanner never was put on trial in the Danzig Soap Case. The British, who investigated the matter in 1945/46, though convinced of Spanner’s participation in the manufacture of soap from human fat, came to the conclusion that he had not committed a crime, since he had conducted “only” experiments with dead bodies.¹⁰⁹ German authorities in 1947/48 also did not find enough incriminating material to open even a pre-trial investigation. Posthumous investigations by the Zentrale Stelle, Ludwigsburg, in the years 1967–2002 came to the result that:

the suspicion and the charges that in the Anatomic Institute of the Danzig Medical School during World War II experiments were conducted in the

industrial production of soap from the fat of human corpses were not corroborated. Incriminating statements to that effect, as have been made by Polish and British witnesses who actually or allegedly were employed at this institute in war-time, could not be verified.¹¹⁰

The Polish side never made an attempt to have Spanner put to trial. No preliminary proceedings were instituted, no action was brought against him, no request was made for extradition. The same holds for his close collaborators: his deputy Dr. Wollmann, Oberpräparator van Barga, and Technical Assistant Koytek. It is also peculiar that Zygmunt Mazur's mother, who had been living all the time together with her son and allegedly had washed the laundry with soap from the institute, was never interrogated.

Under German law, Spanner could be found guilty only of a misdemeanor: the disruption of the dead's rest (§168 Criminal Code).¹¹¹ This would tally with the opinion expressed by the late professor Stanisław Byczkowski, the first postwar rector of the Akademia Medyczna Gdańsk. Asked by his son Janusz, who had read about "Professor Spanner" at school, if Spanner was a criminal, he answered: "A criminal—no. Rather a looter of corpses (*biena cmentarna*)."¹¹²

Conclusions

What, now, is left of the assertions about "Professor Spanner's Soap Factory" quoted at the beginning of this paper? The answer is: nothing. Rudolf Spanner, the alleged "owner" of the "soap factory" and inventor of "a process to produce soap from human fat," was never a member of the SS. No "soap factory" ever existed at Stutthof or at the Danzig Anatomic Institute, no "researches" were conducted there to that effect, no "soap" was made there from Jewish corpses. Nobody was "executed for the 'production' of soap," and none of the corpses found at the liberation of Stutthof had been "used" for that purpose. The majority of corpses delivered to the institute came from (ethnic or Reich) Germans, the rest, apart from a very few Russians, from Poles. With the exception of those Russians, no corpses of Stutthof prisoners were delivered to the institute.

With regard to the accusations raised at Nuremberg and by the Main Commission, we can, moreover, ascertain that no "semi-industrial experiments in the production of soap from human bodies" were carried out at the institute, that Zygmunt Mazur, the main witness, never made soap according to the "recipe" USSR-196, and that the number of corpses taken in and stored in the morgue of the institute did not exceed the needs of teaching and medical research. The equipment in the "suspicious" one-story brick building on the premises of the institute was planned and used not for the manufacture of soap, but for the chemical maceration of body parts. In this process, a soapy grease (Soviet prosecutor Rudenko's "unfinished soap") originates as an inevitable by-product. This is the core of truth inherent in the Soap Factory legend.

For scientific purposes, small amounts of "human fatty soap" (Rudenko's

“finished soap”) were also produced, most probably by refining maceration grease. This grease, maybe even the “finished soap,” was used within the institute for simple cleaning purposes toward the end of the war. Whether Spanner knew about this or even approved of it, is irrelevant—as the head of the institute, he bore full responsibility. Juridically, the manufacture of “human fatty soap” from “maceration grease” and their use for cleaning purposes within the institute were misdemeanors. They do not qualify as criminal offences, let alone as crimes against humanity.

The Danzig Anatomic Institute under Professor Spanner was not involved in the Nazis’ genocidal crimes, a fact that is now officially acknowledged in Poland. The time therefore has come to reduce the “Danzig Soap Case,” inflated by postwar propaganda to a prime example of Nazi German crimes, to its real dimensions. “Revisionists” would lose one of their favorite “arguments” in their efforts to discredit serious Holocaust scholarship. Moreover, de-demonizing “*Profesor Spanner*” would dismantle a popular Polish anti-German stereotype and would contribute to a better mutual understanding. The list of the Nazi crimes perpetrated in Poland and during the Holocaust is long enough. It will not become significantly shorter, if an alleged crime is deleted from it, but it will become more trustworthy.

The author feels greatly indebted to Diethelm Prowe, Jonathan Huener, and the anonymous GSR readers for their very helpful comments.

¹ Letter to the Los Angeles Times, May 16, 1981; quoted from <http://www.nizkor.org/features/techniques-of-denial/appendix-5-02.html>.

² For an in-depth analysis of the “soap legend,” its origin, and its reception history see Joachim Neander, “Seife aus Judenfett,” *FABULA—Journal of Folklore Studies*, no. 3/4 (2005): 241–56. A preliminary paper, presented at the annual meeting of the German Studies Association, October 8, 2004, is at the UCSB History Web site: <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/dachau/legends/NeanderSoap049.html>

³ http://64.143.9.197/jhr/v11/v11p217_Weber.html.

⁴ International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945–1 October 1946* (Nuremberg, Germany: [s. n.], 1947–1950); 42 volumes (“Blue Series,” hereafter IMT); here: vol. 7, 597–600. In his closing address, the Chief British Prosecutor fell back on this issue; IMT vol. 19, 506. The Soviets also presented evidence for an alleged soap production from Auschwitz victims; IMT vol. 7, 173–74. The “Blue Series” is accessible as a written copy at: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/imt.htm>.

⁵ E.g. John Drobnicki is convinced: “The Soap Allegations,” parts 1 to 6: <http://www.nizkor.org/features/techniques-of-denial/soap01.html> to <http://www.nizkor.org/features/techniques-of-denial/soap06.html>; Alex Grobman/Michael Shermer do not preclude it: *Denying History. Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened, and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 115–17.

⁶ Yehuda Bauer, letter to the *Jerusalem Post*, May 29, 1990; quoted from <http://www.nizkor.org/features/techniques-of-denial/appendix-7-01.html>.

⁷ <http://www.gfhn.org.il/gfhnview/dbsearch.asp?start=1> and following Web pages.

⁸ <http://www.jewishgen.org/ForgottenCamps/Camps/StutthofEng.html>. It is identical with

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Holocaust/stutthof.html>. Last visited Feb. 22, 2005.

⁹ Zofia Nałkowska, *Medaliony* [Medallions] (Warszawa: KAMA, 1994). The quotes that follow are from this recent edition, 16–26. Tadeusz Borowski, *Wybór opowiadań* [Selected Short Stories] (Warszawa: KAMA, 1994); references to “human soap” on pages 56 and 97. A semi-official teaching-aid for Polish literature at high schools (*liceum*), published at the beginning of the school year 2004/05, presents “Professor Spanner” as a paradigm for “the degradation of intelligentsia in the service of a criminal ideology” (*Plan pracy nauczyciela*, <http://62.29.253.165/Link?refId=6R5861O56364JKUW7LV55Q18,31>.) Dozens of *sciagi* (cribs) for students depict Spanner as the “Ugly German,” a “monster,” and an “arch-criminal.” The *sciagi* can be found on the Web under “Profesor Spanner” in Polish. Translation of this and all following titles and quotations from Polish or German by the author.

¹⁰ At Stutthof, the soap exhibit disappeared from the museums’ showcase early in 2002.

¹¹ See e.g. Paweł Lutomski, “The Debate about a Center against Expulsions: An Unexpected Crisis in German-Polish Relations?” *German Studies Review* XXVII/3 (2004): 449–68.

¹² Stefan Bratkowski “Znowu?...” [Once again?] and “Kim chcą być Niemcy?” [Who do the Germans want to be?], *Rzeczpospolita*, August 23 and 28, 2003. Erika was born in occupied Poland in 1943. Her father was a soldier of the German occupational forces in West Prussia.

¹³ A small brick building in the courtyard of the Medical School where skeleton preparations were made.

¹⁴ Piotr Piotrowski/Dorota Mikłaszewicz, “Upiory nie zasną już nigdy” [Monsters Never Fall Asleep], *Gazeta Wyborcza Trójmiasto*, Gdańsk, January 21, 2002.

¹⁵ The chronology in this and the following paragraphs is based on Stanisław Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu. Alfa i omega niemieckich zbrodni w Polsce* [Soap from Human Fat. The Alpha and Omega of German Crimes in Poland] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zachodniej Agencji Prasowej, 1946).

¹⁶ Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego [Bureau of Public Security], comparable to the Soviet NKVD. The abbreviation was later shortened to “UB.”

¹⁷ Prosecutor Maciej Schulz of the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, which since 2002 investigated the case of Professor Spanner anew, gives a slightly divergent version: Zygmunt Mazur had already approached the Soviet *komandantura* of Danzig on his initiative in April 1945, and “offered to repeat the manufacture of soap from human fat, but was not taken seriously and sent home.” That is hard to believe. Why should Mazur expose himself to being charged with a crime? According to Schulz, Opiński was also arrested by the UBP, which found the soap when searching his home. Maciej Schulz, “Działalność prof. Rudolfa Marii Spannera w świetle wyników śledztwa Oddziałowej Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Gdańsku” [Prof. Rudolf Maria Spanner’s Activities in the Light of the Results of the Investigations of the Gdańsk Subcommittee on the Persecution of Crimes Against the Polish People]. Paper at the congress “Zbrodnie medycyny w XX wieku. Zaprzeczanie—Wyjaśnianie—Nauczanie [Medical Crimes in the 20th century. Denial—Information—Lessons],” Warsaw, May 21–22, 2004. Text from http://www.ipn.gov.pl/a_210504_konf_wawa_schulz.html.

¹⁸ Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 15.

¹⁹ See “Pamiętniki Zofii Nałkowskiej” [The Diary of Zofia Nałkowska], in: Supplement “Wysokie obcasy” to *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 16, 2001.

²⁰ Aleksandra Biernacka “Śladami gdańskich nekropolii (II)” [On the Traces of Danzig’s Necropolises, Part 2], *Jantarowe Szlaki* 4/1997: 4.

²¹ According to the death certificate issued by the Gdańsk registry office on January 12, 2004

(in possession of the author), he died on July 14, 1945. According to Schulz, *Działalność prof. Rudolfa Marii Spannera*, he already died on July 10, 1945.

²² See note 15. When this research was done, there was still no access to the original Polish documents, but for the purpose of this paper the summaries turned out to be sufficient.

²³ See note 4.

²⁴ Krystyna Szwentnerowa, *Zbrodnia na Via Mercatorum* [The Crime in Via Mercatorum] (Gdynia: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1968). The book deals with the murder of handicapped and severely ill inpatients of the Conradstein/Kocborowo asylum under German occupation. Conradstein was one of the major sources for corpses delivered to Spanner's institute.

²⁵ <http://www.gfh.org.il>.

²⁶ IMT vol. 7, 597–600.

²⁷ Zofia Nałkowska, *Medallions*. Translated from the Polish and with an introduction by Diana Kuprel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000). *Profesor Spanner* already appeared in 1964 in English translation in: Adam Gillon/Ludwik Krzyżanowski, eds., *Introduction to Modern Polish Literature. An Anthology of Fiction and Poetry* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964).

²⁸ Although the booklet is primarily a fiercely anti-German propaganda brochure, it gives far more detailed factual information than Nałkowska's short story.

²⁹ Treated thus e. g. by Nizkor, *The Soap Allegations*, part 5, and nearly all over Poland.

³⁰ Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 21–23.

³¹ http://64.143.9.197/jhr/v01/v01p131_Harwood.html.

³² <http://www.corax.org/revisionism/misc/frenzsoap.html>.

³³ So, eg., Mark Weber: "It is worth emphasizing here that the 'evidence' presented at the Nuremberg Tribunal for the bogus soap story was no less substantial than the 'evidence' presented for the claims of mass extermination in 'gas chambers'." http://64.143.9.197/jhr/v11/v11p217_Weber.html.

³⁴ As an example may serve a commentary on the *revforum* Web site: "Putting these scans [of the Nuremberg Documents USSR-196, 197, 264, and 272] up for viewing [...] allows people to actually see the junk that was submitted as evidence." <http://revforum.yourforum.org/viewtopic.php?t=676>.

³⁵ *Soap.doc*. Contact via the museum's Web site: <http://www.ushmm.org>.

³⁶ Tadeusz Skutnik, "Oskarżenie profesora Spannera" [Accusing Professor Spanner], "Obrona profesora Spannera [Defending Professor Spanner] (2), "Obrona profesora Spannera (3); *Dziennik Bałtycki*, May 12, 19, and 26, 2000.

³⁷ Piotrowski/Mikłaszewicz, *Upiory nie zasną już nigdy*.

³⁸ This and preceding quotes from: Roman Daszczyński/Krzysztof Wójcik „Mydło z ludzi to nie ludobójstwo” [Soap from Human Beings Isn't Genocide], *Gazeta Wyborcza Kraj*, September 2, 2005. The IPN's statement that Spanner was not involved in genocide unleashed a storm of indignation in Poland. In hundreds of Web posts and letters to newspaper editors, the IPN was accused of "national treason" and "toadying the Germans." It shows how deeply rooted the Danzig soap legend is in Polish collective memory.

³⁹ Strąbski already in 1946 remarked (without coming to the obvious conclusion): „Nasza Komisja fachowcównie przysłała” [Our commission did not dispatch experts]; *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 30.

⁴⁰ Eric J. Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁴¹ The monthly ration for adult Poles in the General Government was "one piece of soap and 250g of washing-powder per capita." Tadeusz Wroński, *Kronika okupowanego Krakowa* [Chronicle of Occupied Cracow] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974), 186, 325.

⁴² The fatty acid composition of human fat is given in: T. Raclot and others "Selective fatty

acid release from human fat cells," *Biochemical Journal* 324 (1997): 911–15. The composition of common vegetable and animal fats can be found in every general encyclopedia.

⁴³ The chemistry of fats and soap can be found in every textbook on organic chemistry for undergraduate students. There are also numerous Web sites from universities dealing with this subject, e.g. <http://www.organik.uni-erlangen.de/vostrowsky/natstoff/1nafettsr.pdf> (in German). The alkali salts of fatty acids make soap a detergent. Customary soap contains also water, perfumes and colors, sometimes also microscopically small air bubbles to make it swim. Sand or clay minerals make the soap abrasive. In wartime, they were often added primarily for adulteration.

⁴⁴ An experiment that everybody can carry out even at home is described, together with an overview over the history of soap-making, on the university Web site <http://www.experimentalchemie.de/versuch-024.htm>.

⁴⁵ „Die hydrolytische Spaltung wurde [...] erstmalig 1833 von A. de Milly und A. Mortard unter Druck versucht [...]. Als Erfinder der Spaltung im industriellen Sinne gilt E. Twitchell (1862–1926), der drucklos mit Katalysatoren arbeitete. [...] Sein in den USA entwickeltes Verfahren wurde auch in Europa vielfältig eingesetzt. Ab ca. 1900 setzte sich in der [deutschen] Industrie die Druckspaltung mehr und mehr durch—sie lieferte bessere Glycerin- und Fettsäurequalitäten. Zunächst wurde sie batchweise durchgeführt, später dann, ab ca. 1935, auch in kontinuierlicher Herstellweise." Letter from Dr. Alfred Westfechtel, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Fettwissenschaft, Frankfurt am Main, to the author, April 15, 2004.

⁴⁶ <http://www.uni-essen.de/chemiedidaktik/S+WM/Gewinnung/Seifenherstellung4.htm>.

⁴⁷ IMT vol. 7, 600.

⁴⁸ Ibid. The originals cannot be found; good-quality photographs on the Web site of The Nizkor Project, <http://www.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/camps/ftp.py?camps/stutthof/soap-photos/ussr-393.jpg>.

⁴⁹ Corroborated by the testimony of Dr. med. Hans Havlíček at Friedberg on July 10, 1948. Date given in Spanner's interrogation on May 13, 1947, p. 3. Archives of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, Germany, record group Gf 01.13/1, without pagination. In the following quoted as IfZ Gf 01.13/1. See also IMT vol. 7, 600.

⁵⁰ Report in Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 30.

⁵¹ See e.g. <http://www.jewishgen.org/ForgottenCamps/Camps/StutthofEng.html>, or picture number 12312 of the Beit Lohamei Haghetatot Photo Collection, <http://www.gfh.org.il/gfhview/dbsearch.asp?start=1>.

⁵² <http://whale.wheelock.edu/archives/info02/0001.html>, paragraph 6.

⁵³ Statement by Spanner, Kiel, November 9, 1945, and testimony of Dr. med. Hans Havlíček, July 10, 1948. IfZ Gf 01.13/1. The maceration of plastinated organs, however, requires a 35% solution of alkali hydroxides. It explains the great amount of sodium hydroxide found by the investigation commissions.

⁵⁴ Statement by Spanner, Kiel, November 9, 1945, and interrogation of Spanner on February 12, 1948. IfZ Gf 01.13/1.

⁵⁵ IMT vol. 7, 598. This opinion is still shared by the IPN: "The German state was a perfectly organized state with no room for unauthorized behavior. If Spanner did make soap from human corpses, he must have met the approval of the highest Reich authorities." Edmund Krasowski, head of the Gdańsk Section of the IPN, on television channel TVP3, September 2, 2005.

⁵⁶ Spanner, May 13, 1947, p. 4; Havlíček, July 10, 1948. IfZ Gf 01.13/1.

⁵⁷ USSR-264.

⁵⁸ USSR-272.

⁵⁹ USSR-197.

⁶⁰ Nałkowska, *Profesor Spanner*, passim. The fifth British witness, Jack Sherriff, did not mention the “soap” at all.

⁶¹ Waclaw Bernard from Ostrów Wielkopolski, in April 1945 a militiaman in Gdańsk, was sensationally presented to the Polish public in spring 2005 as “the last surviving eyewitness.” Marek Weiss “Świadek zbrodni” [The witness of the crime], *Gazeta Poznańska*, May 17, 2005.

⁶² USSR-272.

⁶³ For a critical analysis of the behavior of eyewitnesses in court see e. g.: Elizabeth Loftus, *Eyewitness Testimony* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

⁶⁴ His father, a railroader, was arrested by the Germans immediately after the capture of Danzig in September 1939 and spent the entire war in a concentration camp.

⁶⁵ According to his personal file, kept at the Archiwum Państwowe Gdańsk, on February 1, 1944, he changed from the AOK, the workers’ health insurance, to the Barmer Ersatzkasse, a health insurance for *Angestellte* only.

⁶⁶ Data taken from his personal file at the Archiwum Państwowe Gdańsk.

⁶⁷ Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 21–23.

⁶⁸ USSR-197. Koytek’s CV is kept in her personal file at the Archiwum Państwowe Gdańsk.

⁶⁹ Szwentnerowa, *Zbrodnia na Via Mercatorum*, 164.

⁷⁰ Skutnik, *Obrona profesora Spannera* (3).

⁷¹ USSR-197.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 80 kg of fatty tissue contain about 65 kg of fat, which, multiplied by 1.5 for the sodium content and the necessary amount of water, yield about 100 kg of soap ready for use. If “human fat” had meant “pure” fat, the output should have been about 120 kg of soap ready for use, which gives an “error” in a magnitude even of a factor of five.

⁷⁴ The forensic commission that investigated the corpses on May 16 and 17, 1945, stressed in its report that the beheaded corpses were “dobrego odrzywania [sic!] i mocnej budowy ciała” [well-fed and of a strong physique]. Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 32.

⁷⁵ USSR-197.

⁷⁶ Strąbski spitefully writes about Mazur: “He chose *Völkdeutschostwo*. He is a person of zero morality like all those who betray their nation.” *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 20. “*Völkdeutschostwo*” in the original.

⁷⁷ Law Concerning the Elimination of Enemy Elements from Polish Society, of May 6, 1945, paragraph 16. Quoted from: Zygmunt Izdebski. *Niemiecka lista narodowa na Górnym Śląsku* [The German People’s List in Upper Silesia] (Katowice-Wrocław: Wydawnictwa Instytutu Śląskiego, 1946), 210–15, here 212.

⁷⁸ Statement given at Kiel on November 9, 1945. IFZ Gf 01.13/1. It is, in principle, possible to use the “maceration grease” or a refined product from it for this purpose (letter from Prof. Jürgen Koebke, Chair of Anatomy, Cologne University, Germany, to the author; September 10, 2005), though this technique is not mentioned in the relevant literature and other methods are known. For this reason, the IPN dismissed Spanner’s statement as “storytelling.”

⁷⁹ Records of the interrogations and of the release order in IFZ Gf 01.13/1.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Schulz, *Działalność prof. Rudolfa Marii Spannera*.

⁸² Moreover, both proposals make little sense. Fat does not contain protein molecules, so DNA analysis will hardly work. Gas chromatography will only yield results within a broad error margin due to the high variability of the composition of human body fat.

⁸³ Schulz, *Działalność prof. Rudolfa Marii Spannera*.

⁸⁴ Nałkowska, *Profesor Spanner*, 17. Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 12–13.

⁸⁵ Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 14–15.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁷ IfZ Gf 01.13/1.

⁸⁸ Strąbski, *Mydło z ludzkiego tłuszczu*, 30–31.

⁸⁹ The 11 medical schools of the states of Texas, Maryland, and Colorado together obtain 3,000 corpses a year (<http://www.koerperwelten.de/de/pages/Gutachten-Das%20Koerperplastinat.asp> paragraph 7), which yields an average of 250 to 300 corpses a year for every school. The (relatively small) Medical University of Innsbruck, Austria, has “storage place for 216 entire corpses and ample reserve space for partial preparations” in the morgue of its Anatomic Institute, <http://www2.uibk.ac.at/ahe/institut/keller-de.html>.

⁹⁰ USSR-197, also confirmed by Spanner in his postwar interrogations.

⁹¹ Interrogation on February 12, 1948. IfZ Gf 01.13/1.

⁹² The Germans called all Soviet citizens “Russians,” except Ukrainians and inhabitants of the Baltic Republics.

⁹³ Interrogation of Spanner on May 13, 1947, p. 3. IfZ Gf 01.13/1.

⁹⁴ Interrogated on May 13, 1947, Spanner spoke of “one or two [...] Russian corpses [...] from a concentration camp near Danzig,” the name of which he allegedly could not recall. IfZ Gf 01.13/1. Mazur remembered “four corpses of Russian people, men,” from Stutthof. USSR-197.

⁹⁵ May 13, 1947, p. 3. IfZ Gf 01.13/1. At least no “soap” could have been made from those corpses.

⁹⁶ See Szwentnerowa, *Zbrodnia na Via Mercatorum*, passim. Also Volker Rieß, *Die Anfänge der Vernichtung “lebensunwerten Lebens” in den Reichsgauen Danzig-Westpreußen und Wartheland 1939/40* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), 23–53.

⁹⁷ According to an agreement between Himmler and Reich Minister of Justice Thierack, from September 19, 1942. Nuremberg Document PS-654, paragraph 14.

⁹⁸ Interrogation of Spanner, May 13, 1947. IfZ Gf 01.13/1. According to Nałkowska (*Profesor Spanner*, 21), Zygmunt Mazur mentioned “four German soldiers” guillotined at the Danzig prison.

⁹⁹ Letter to *The Jewish Standard*, January 9, 1991; quoted from <http://www.nizkor.org/features/techniques-of-denial/appendix-7-02.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Corroborated by the testimonies of W. A. Neely (USSR-272) and A. Neil (PRO file WO 311/275).

¹⁰¹ Interrogation on May 13, 1947. IfZ Gf 01.13/1.

¹⁰² Depending on the nationality of those who express this view.

¹⁰³ Nałkowska, *Profesor Spanner*, 20.

¹⁰⁴ Personal file at Archiwum Państwowe Gdańsk. Facsimile reproduction in Szwentnerowa, *Zbrodnia na Via Mercatorum*, between pp. 160 and 161. Also Spanner’s interrogation on May 13, 1947. IfZ Gf 01.13/1.

¹⁰⁵ Caption of his profile portrait; Szwentnerowa, *Zbrodnia na Via Mercatorum*, before p. 145.

¹⁰⁶ Schulz, *Działalność prof. Rudolfa Marii Spannera*.

¹⁰⁷ Interrogation on May 14, 1947. IfZ Gf 01.13/1.

¹⁰⁸ As remembered by Wincenty Natkański, according to Piotrowski/Mikłaszewicz, *Upiory nie zasną już nigdy*.

¹⁰⁹ Brytyjski ślad mydła [British Soap Traces]. *Gazeta Wyborcza Trójmiasto*, February 4, 2002. See also <http://www.republika.pl/antinazi/luty4.htm>.

¹¹⁰ Letter from the Zentrale Stelle to the Institut Pamięci Narodowej, July 11, 2002.

¹¹¹ Letter from prosecutor Dr. Riedel, Zentrale Stelle, to the author, December 3, 2003.

¹¹² Piotrowski/Mikłaszewicz, *Upiory nie zasną już nigdy*.