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## Zdzisław Askanas (1910–1974) – materials for a physician’s biography

**Zarys treści:** Artykuł jest próbą odtworzenia biografii Zdzisława Askanasa (1910-1974), jednego z największych polskich kardiologów, twórcy szkoły kardiologicznej, wychowawcy wielu lekarzy, społecznika, propagatora profilaktyki kardiologicznej, profesora Akademii Medycznej w Warszawie, a także uczestnika kampanii wrześniowej i powstania warszawskiego.

**Abstract:** This article is an attempt to recreate the biography of Zdzisław Askanas (1910–1974), one of the greatest Polish cardiologists and founder of a cardiology school, mentor of numerous physicians, social worker, proponent of cardiac disease prevention, professor of the Medical University of Warsaw, and participant in the September 1939 campaign and Warsaw Uprising.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Zdzisław Askanas, historia medycyny XX w., kardiologia, Żydzi lekarze, lekarze w powstaniu warszawskim, getto warszawskie, Żydzi z Płocka

**Keywords:** Zdzisław Askanas, history of 20th century medicine, cardiology, Jewish physicians, physicians in the Warsaw Uprising, Warsaw ghetto, Jews from Płock.

The physician Zdzisław Askanas, who founded the Polish school of cardiology after the war, has not yet merited a comprehensive biography.<sup>1</sup> He was one of the few Jews who managed to survive the Holocaust in Polish territories. Although his life story is hardly typical of the Jewish community, the fortunes of Askanas and his close family members bear witness to the hardships of occupation times, which required a determination to live, help from others, an ounce of luck and other factors to survive. Askanas’s biography not only increases our knowledge on the Shoah but also constitutes an interesting contribution to the discussion on the fortunes of Polish Jews in communist Poland. For the few survivors who had not

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. K. Tymińska, K.J. Filipiak, G. Opolski, “Zdzisław Askanas 1910–1974,” in: *Złota Księga Medycyny Warszawskiej*, ed. M. Krawczyk, Warszawa, 2009, pp. 1–7. [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zdzisław\\_Askanas](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zdzisław_Askanas) (accessed: 14 January 2019).

left Poland, the post-war reality turned out to be not easy at all. Askanas decided not to emigrate, lived through the March 1968 anti-Semitic purge and died a few years later.

## Family history

Zdzisław Askanas was a scion of a known and relatively well-off Jewish family which, since the mid-eighteenth century, lived in the environs of the Mazovian town of Płock and, since the early nineteenth century, in the town itself. Traces of the Askanases can be found in numerous archival documents. Zdzisław's ancestors, just like other families ranked among Jewish community elites, pursued trade and commerce. They multiplied their assets by skilfully investing savings, and taking advantage of times of prosperity and other economic opportunities. The grain trade brought considerable profits and was the bedrock on which fortunes of Jewish families grew.<sup>2</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, when prohibitions on the purchase of land estates by Jews were lifted, one method of investing capital was to buy indebted properties set up for auction by the Land Credit Society. In this way, Zdzisław's great-grandfather, Józef Askanas, in addition to trading as a merchant of the First Guild and owning property in Płock, decided to invest in land. He purchased three estates: Łubki and Świerczynek in Płock County, and Kamienne Brody in Lipno County.<sup>3</sup> In the 1870s, he moved to Łubki to directly manage his farm. His son Samuel was also a Płock merchant with a thriving commercial business and contacts with foreign partners, even from the United States, and also acted as an agent of the Russian Insurance Company in the town. In 1890, he purchased a spacious property at 30 Szeroka Street, Płock.

Both Józef and his son Samuel played an active role in the social and religious life of the Jewish community, being members of the Płock Synagogue Supervision Committee<sup>4</sup> and making efforts to have a Talmudic school opened in the town. Józef was one of the founders of the Izaak Fogl Hospital<sup>5</sup> and contributed 300 roubles to purchase a plot of land for a new Jewish cemetery. Samuel was the patron

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion on the Askanas family genealogy, see the article by K. Grochowska-Iwańska, "Dwa i pół wieku rodziny Askanasów w Płocku. Część 1," *Notatki Płockie*, 2016, no. 2/246, pp. 3–9, [http://www.tnp.org.pl/Notatki\\_Plockie\\_2016\\_nr\\_2.pdf](http://www.tnp.org.pl/Notatki_Plockie_2016_nr_2.pdf) (accessed: 30 October 2018).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. When Józef Askanas died, the Łubki estate was inherited by his sons: Ludwik, Markus, Mojżesz and Samuel. Cf. *Kalendarz Informator Płocki na rok 1899*, Płock, 1899, p. 70, <http://www.tnp.org.pl/biblioteka/dlibra/docmetadata?id=158> (accessed: 30 October 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Sokolnicki, "Żydzi w życiu politycznym Płocka do 1919 roku," *Notatki Płockie*, 2004, no. 49/1–198, pp. 22–30, [http://mazowsze.hist.pl/40/fack\\_you\\_admin/840/2004/1317/1\\_198/31523/](http://mazowsze.hist.pl/40/fack_you_admin/840/2004/1317/1_198/31523/) (accessed: 30 October 2018); *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego*, vol. 3, Warszawa, 1882, p. 771; vol. 5, Warszawa, 1884, p. 774; vol. 11, Warszawa, 1890, p. 672.

<sup>5</sup> Later the Izaak Fogl Jewish Hospital, cf. <https://jewishplock.eu/> (accessed: 10 December 2019).

of the Old People and Invalids Home and a honorary member of the Płock Fire-Fighting Society.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel married Anna (Chana Etta), née Grynberg. They had three children: Zdzisław's father Wiktor, born in 1883, a daughter, Salomea, and another son, Alfons Lejzer, merchant and art collector. Wiktor went to study pharmacy at the French Sorbonne and in 1907 married Eugenia Lipszyc, later moving with her to Warsaw.<sup>7</sup> Initially, the spouses lived at 8 Sienna Street: Wiktor ran a chemist's and his wife worked as a seamstress. It is notable that as early as 1908 they had a telephone installed, which means that they were quite affluent.<sup>8</sup> Later, the Askanas couple moved to 139/7 Marszałkowska Street, to a house owned by Paweł Truskier.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1880s, Marszałkowska Street developed rapidly, becoming one of Warsaw's high streets, with commercial outlets, numerous stores, warehouses and even industrial facilities. It was also a popular street for lawyers and doctors to set up their practices. The pastry shops and restaurants became places of social gatherings, and Jewish businessmen frequently moved their offices there as well. The busy nature of the street guaranteed higher revenues and spurred the growth of their businesses. The firm of Wiktor Askanas must have flourished, as it stayed at that important city point until World War Two. The store's advertising published in *Warszawski Skorowidz Branżowy na rok 1936–1937* stands out against others of its kind due to the thickness of the typeface.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, Wiktor Askanas was able to spare some extra expense for publicity, because his outlet was earning quite a profit. It is possible that this success was influenced by selling face cream whose formula Wiktor brought from France.<sup>11</sup>

Wiktor and Eugenia had two sons, Stefan<sup>12</sup> and Zdzisław, the latter born on 1 June 1910.<sup>13</sup> Providing both with suitable education was a priority for the parents. The boys were brought up by a German governess and therefore mastered German perfectly at an early age. They were also visited by a French teacher, although only Polish was spoken at home. The family had a gift for music: Wiktor played the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. K. Grochowska-Iwańska, op. cit., pp. 7–8; "Tydzień" (Piotrków), 9, 1881, no. 42, <http://bc.wbp.lodz.pl/Content/6090/Tydzien1881nr42a.pdf> (accessed: 30 October 2018).

<sup>7</sup> The account of Aleksander Askanas.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Adresy Warszawy na rok 1908*, Warszawa, 1909, pp. 177, 380; <http://ebuw.uw.edu.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=7571> (accessed: 30 October 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. "Taryfa posesji (domów i placów) miasta Warszawy i Przedmieścia Pragi," in: *Kalendarz Informacyjno-Encyklopedyczny na rok 1912*, p. XXXIV; *Księga Adresowa Polski (wraz z W. M. Gdańskiem) dla handlu, przemysłu, rzemiosła i rolnictwa*, Warszawa, 1930, p. 1864.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Warszawski Skorowidz Branżowy na rok 1936–37*, Warszawa, n.d., p. 363.

<sup>11</sup> The account of Aleksander Askanas.

<sup>12</sup> Stefan Askanas (1908–1972), in 1939 junior lieutenant in the Polish Army, participant in the September 1939 campaign, economist from 1954 to 1966 and executive director of the International Poznań Fair.

<sup>13</sup> Archive of the University of Warsaw, Personal File of Zdzisław Askanas, call no. WL 29385 [hereinafter: AUW].

violin, Eugenia the cello, Stefan the flute and Zdzisław the piano.<sup>14</sup> The younger son demonstrated an aptitude for music and later attended a musical school, even considering pursuing his studies in this direction.

## Education

Before this took place, however, Zdzisław started his gymnasium education. Having successfully passed the entrance exams, on 1 September 1917 he started his first day at the private Roch Kowalski Gymnasium for boys located at 27 Świętokrzyska Street. It is possible that this school was chosen because it was close to the Askanases' home: 139 Marszałkowska Street is only a short distance from 27 Świętokrzyska Street. The Roch Kowalski Gymnasium was founded in 1888. It was initially located at 13 Chłodna Street and later moved to 27 Świętokrzyska Street.<sup>15</sup> Initially run as a two-grade private school, in 1900 it was converted into a preparatory philological gymnasium, and in 1908 into a private eight-grade school with Russian as the language of instruction, replaced by Polish in the school year 1915/16. The *Spis nauczycieli szkół wyższych, średnich...* published in 1924 lists some of the tutors who taught Zdzisław Askanas at the Roch Kowalski Gymnasium.<sup>16</sup> Zdzisław's graduation certificate bears the signature of Principal Aleksy Strzeszewski, as well as that of PE teacher Roman Cieślewski, chemistry teacher Julia Światłowska and Roch Kowalski himself, who taught introduction to philosophy.<sup>17</sup> In May and June 1928, Zdzisław sat the ordinary final gymnasium exams in humanities. He was not a particularly diligent pupil. His final certificate shows mostly C's, with a single A awarded for "bodily exercises."<sup>18</sup>

The next stage in young Zdzisław's education was university. Why he chose Warsaw University and for what reason he applied to enrol in the Faculty of Medicine remains unknown. Ultimately, he was not admitted due to the limited number of places. Formally, Warsaw University did not restrict Jews from becoming students; in practice, however, they might have encountered various hindrances. In the early 1920s, the percentage of Jewish youth admitted to the University was steadily falling.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. A. Askanas, *Black Swastika, Red Swastika*, n.p., 2009, p. 21. As reminisced by Aleksander: "My father was a very good piano player, showing particular skill in sight-reading" (The account of Aleksander Askanas).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Niklewska, *Prywatne szkoły średnie w Warszawie 1905–1915*, Warszawa, 1987, p. 257.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Z. Zagórowski, *Spis nauczycieli szkół wyższych, średnich, zawodowych, seminariów nauczycielskich oraz wykaz zakładów naukowych i władz szkolnych*, Lwów–Warszawa, 1924, [http://www.mtg-malopolska.org.pl/images/skany/spis\\_nauczycieli/spis\\_nauczycieli.pdf](http://www.mtg-malopolska.org.pl/images/skany/spis_nauczycieli/spis_nauczycieli.pdf) (accessed: 30 October 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A.U.W.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> In the academic year 1929/1930, the percentage of Jews among those enrolling in the Faculty of Medicine was 22% and fell to 19.8% by 1935/1936. Mojżesz Kleinbaum, chairman of the Jewish

Jewish youth was certainly more successful in accessing the Faculty of Humanities, and therefore Zdzisław, after his failure to matriculate in the Faculty of Medicine, revised his application to undertake a course in humanities. On 23 October 1928, he was enrolled in the Warsaw University Faculty of Humanities. He started English and Czech language courses and attended psychology lectures.<sup>20</sup> He treated these activities as an intermission, and a year later he applied again to study at the Faculty of Medicine. In a request addressed in 1929 to the dean of Warsaw University, he explained his decision as follows: “I enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities so as to keep up my pace of work and learn foreign languages. Wishing to study medicine, I am trying to gain admission to student body once again.”<sup>21</sup> In 1929, he successfully passed his entrance exams, and in the autumn started his longed-for studies at the Faculty of Medicine. The complex of buildings occupied by the Faculty where Askanas studied for a number of years was located in the south-western part of the Śródmieście quarter. The main edifice was the Collegium Anatomicum at 5 Chałubińskiego Street. From the 1920s, the adjacent premises at 1 Oczki Street housed the Department of Forensic Medicine with dissecting rooms and auxiliary facilities. The other side of the street, a block delimited by Chałubińskiego, Nowogrodzka, Lindleya and Oczki Streets, held the pavilions of the university's Infant Jesus Hospital. The Faculty also owned, among other facilities, the Holy Ghost Hospital in Elektoralna Street, a paediatric clinic in Litewska Street, an obstetric clinic at 3 Starynkiewicza Street and a psychiatric clinic at the Saint John of God Hospital at 7 Konwiktorska Street.<sup>22</sup>

Early in his studies at the Faculty of Medicine Askanas met his fellow student Rachela Cajlingold (born 7 September 1911). The two soon fell deeply in love and married despite knowing each other for only a short time. In contrast to the partially assimilated Askanases, the Cajlingolds were a traditional Jewish family. Rachela's parents lost their sustenance due to the fraudulent actions of their relatives. Her father became a rank-and-file worker in a company he had previously

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Association of Medics, appealed to Jewish students and physicians to continue the struggle for their rights: “Yet, Jews wishing to earn a degree in medicine are beset with difficulties on all sides, and those who managed to graduate are barred from practising. Young Jewish medics must therefore not only struggle for their right to be educated but also prepare beforehand to fight for their right to work, to serve as a physician and to be granted equal terms in their rights and duties towards the state.” Cf. M. Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe, numerus nullus, “paragraf aryjski”: Antysemityzm na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1931–1939*, Warszawa, 1999, p. 19; P.M. Majewski, “Społeczność akademicka 1915–1939,” in: *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1945*, Warszawa, 2016, p. 148; M. Kleinbaum, “Stowarzyszenie – szkołą służby społecznej,” in: *Żydowskie Stowarzyszenie Medyków Uniwersytetu Józefa Piłsudskiego w Warszawie. Wydawnictwo Jubileuszowe oraz sprawozdanie z Działalności za Rok 1937*, Warszawa, 1938, p. 11, <http://mbc.cyfrowemazowsze.pl/dlibra/plain-content?id=24981> (accessed: 3 November 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. AUW.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. P. Majewski, op. cit., p. 60.

managed. Rachela had to give lessons to pay for her gymnasium tuition fees.<sup>23</sup> In 1928, she graduated from Wiktoria Jędryczkowska's eight-grade private gymnasium for girls located at 11 Elektoralna Street in Warsaw.<sup>24</sup> Following their wedding, the young Askanas couple moved to a rented flat in Złota Street. From the very beginning, they were plagued by financial difficulties related to family upkeep and paying for studies. Zdzisław made ends meet by giving lessons, a common device used by poorer pupils and students to improve their finances. For giving lessons to one of his pupils, in addition to a monthly fee of 25 zlotys, he was also offered free lunches. At the same time, he tried to have his tuition fees reduced; one attempt at this was made in the academic year 1934/35. He filed an application to the Faculty Board, but despite his good grades, passing all tests and exams, and attaching a "certificate of impecuniousness," his request was refused. He did, however, obtain a 50 zloty loan from the vice-chancellor's office, and was also assisted by the Jewish Association of Medics,<sup>25</sup> which granted financial aid to a huge percentage of young Jewish medical students.<sup>26</sup>

Despite their financial hardships, both Mr and Mrs Askanas successfully completed their studies and received their M.D. diplomas on the same day, 12 June 1935.<sup>27</sup> Soon, they also started to work in the profession. Their joint office was initially located at 66 Polna Street, and later at 46 Mokotowska Street.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to his private practice, Zdzisław worked under the supervision of two eminent pre-war internal medicine specialists. The first of them, Professor Mściwoj Semerau-Siemianowski (1885–1953), was one of the first Polish cardiologists to head the Second Internal Diseases Clinic of the St. Lazarus Hospital located at 2 Książęca Street, which was completely destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The guardian of Rachela's grandmother, an uncle by the name of Jamajka, sold a small land estate inherited by the grandmother from her parents and left for Johannesburg, taking the money with him. Rachela's father, having an entrepreneurial spirit, together with his relatives ran a business procuring agricultural produce from peasants in eastern Poland. In the late 1920s, the family resolved to migrate to Palestine. The business was sold, and Rachela's grandparents were the first to leave for the new homeland. Unfortunately, the grandfather soon died, and his wife cabled the family not to come, because no money was to be earned there. Cf. A. Askanas, an unpublished story entitled *I Need Her More Than Ever Now*; id., *Black Swastika...*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>24</sup> Wiktoria Jędryczkowska's school was established in 1909 in Warsaw as a seven-grade boarding facility, initially located at 4 Ciepła Street; in 1919, it became an eight-grade gymnasium with limited rights. See Z. Zagórowski, op. cit., p. 255.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. AUW.

<sup>26</sup> S. Kotowicz, "Żydowskie Stowarzyszenie Medyków U. J. P. Stowarzyszenie szkołą służby społecznej," in: *Żydowskie Stowarzyszenie Medyków Uniwersytetu Józefa Piłsudskiego w Warszawie. Wydawnictwo Jubileuszowe oraz sprawozdanie z działalności za rok 1937*, Warszawa, 1938, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Rocznik Lekarski Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na 1936 rok*, Warszawa, 1936, p. 1649.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Rocznik Lekarski Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na 1938 rok*, Warszawa, 1938, p. 642.

<sup>29</sup> Apart from Askanas, other pupils of Professor Mściwoj Semerau-Siemianowski included two other eminent cardiologists: Professor Edmund Żera (1899–1993) and Professor Jerzy Jakubowski

The young doctor was also tutored by Professor Jakub Węgierko (1889–1960), one of the founders of Polish diabetology, since 1935 head of the observational ward of the St. Stanislaus Hospital for Infectious Diseases (37 Wolska Street).<sup>30</sup> Concomitantly, he worked at the Department of General and Experimental Pathology of the Warsaw University Faculty of Medicine (26/28 Krakowskie Przedmieście), headed by Professor Franciszek Venulet (1878–1967),<sup>31</sup> first as a volunteer, then assistant and senior assistant, and started to write his PhD thesis on cardiology. Rachela Askanas likewise continued her professional and medical education and had her articles published in the *Medycyna i Przyroda* medical journal.<sup>32</sup> She was employed as an assistant at the Jewish Bersohn and Bauman Children's Hospital at 60 Sienna Street.<sup>33</sup> Immediately prior to the war, the financial situation of the Askanases markedly improved. In 1938, Zdzisław's income from his private practice alone was 3,600 zlotys.<sup>34</sup> Considering additional jobs and Rachela's salary, the family's financial standing was quite satisfactory, especially as both husband and wife were still at the onset of their medical careers. Their relative professional successes were also combined with an important change in their private lives when their son Aleksander was born in 1938.

## The war and ghetto

The looming war, however, put an end to the Askanases' plans for a settled life. Already in March 1939 Zdzisław was summoned for military exercises and on 24 August finally mobilized as a physician with the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, participating in the defence of the Modlin fortress during the September campaign.

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(born Muszkatzenblit, 1887–1967), the latter of whom survived the Holocaust in the Soviet Union and opened a cardiology school in Łódź after the war. All three of them founded their own schools.

<sup>30</sup> Professor Jakub Węgierko, who came from a very poor Jewish family, was the son of a gardener at the Okopowa Street Jewish cemetery and brother of the noted stage player and director Aleksander Węgierko.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. K. Tymińska, K.J. Filipiak, G. Opolski, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Department of Old Medical Books of the Main Medical Library in Warsaw [hereinafter: GBL], Personal File of Alina Askanas, call no. I-1124.

<sup>33</sup> The Bersohn and Bauman Hospital was founded in 1876–1878 on the initiative of Majer and Chaja Bersohn, their daughter Paulina Bauman, and her husband Solomon. In 1923, due to a difficult financial situation, the facility was closed down, but in 1930, thanks to the efforts of Dr Anna Braude-Hellerowa, it came into the possession of the Friends of Children Society, and was expanded and furnished with modern equipment thanks to the financial support of the Jewish community and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In the 1930s, it was one of the most modern paediatric facilities in Poland. Cf. H. Kroszczor, "Szpital dla dzieci im. Bersohnów i Baumanów (1924–1939)," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, 73, 1970, pp. 68–91; 74, 1970, p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. GBL, Personal File of Zdzisław Askanas, call no. I-1124.

His direct superior was Junior Colonel Stefan Zając.<sup>35</sup> For his part in the campaign and demonstrating acts of particular courage, such as evacuating the wounded under enemy fire, he was decorated with the Cross of Valour. Following capitulation, together with other officers and NCOs from his regiment, he stayed for a few weeks in the temporary camp at Działdowo. Afterwards, he was discharged alongside a host of other soldiers and returned to Warsaw.<sup>36</sup>

In the first weeks of occupation, the population, and especially the Jewish community, was already subjected to dramatic changes, and the consequences of new ordinances reflected on the Askansas as well. They had to leave their Mokotowska flat and move to Muranów to live at 38/8 Nowolipki Street. As the Germans closed down the university, Zdzisław could no longer work at the Faculty of Medicine clinics. He still owed his livelihood mainly to private practice, but the income was much smaller than before the war – he received a total of 570 zlotys from patients for the first three months of 1940. At that time, he also worked at various public healthcare facilities; for example, the “Zdrowie” outpatient clinic at 27 Leszno Street, the Poor Patients Outpatient Clinic at 20 Nowolipki Street and 11 Grzybowska Street, and the Health Protection Society (TOZ) Outpatient Clinic at 43 Gęsia Street. He also volunteered to work as a physician at the 4<sup>th</sup> Health Centre.<sup>37</sup>

In the autumn of 1939, health care was subordinated to German authorities. All physicians had to fill out registration questionnaires listing their place of employment

<sup>35</sup> In the regimental personnel listing from 31 August 1939, next to “physician,” there is a note saying “unknown.” It is possible that this refers to Askansas, because I was unable to find his name in any available publication. Cf. W. Parfieniuk, *32 Pułk Piechoty. Zarys historii wojennej w kampanii wrześniowej*, Warszawa, 2013, p. 32; *Rocznik oficerski 1939. Stan na dzień 23 marca 1939*, ed. R. Rybka, K. Stepan, Kraków, 2006, p. 586.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. T. Urzykowski, “Profesor legenda. Uczniowie zaczęli rzucić palenie,” *Gazeta Wyborcza* [hereinafter: *GW*] of 12 January 2013, [http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,54420,13254879,Profesor\\_legenda\\_Uczniowie\\_zaczeli\\_rzucac\\_palenie.html](http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,54420,13254879,Profesor_legenda_Uczniowie_zaczeli_rzucac_palenie.html) (accessed: 3 November 2018); “On 30 September they took us to Działdowo, where all officers and some NCOs were quartered [...] From 15 to 27 October all officers were discharged from captivity.” Cf. The Polish Institute and History Museum in London, *Relacja z Kampanii 1939 roku*, call no. B.I.20d, 8 *Dywizja Piechoty – 32 pułk piechoty (bez III baonu)*, [https://sikorskimuseum-my.sharepoint.com/personal/admin\\_sikorskimuseum\\_onmicrosoft\\_com/\\_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin\\_sikorskimuseum\\_onmicrosoft\\_com%2FDocuments%2Fweb\\_files%2FB\\_I%2Fb\\_20d%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin\\_sikorskimuseum\\_onmicrosoft\\_com%2FDocuments%2Fweb\\_files%2FB\\_I&cid=258fcfc3-8491-4cd2-b769-288dc6ddcc95](https://sikorskimuseum-my.sharepoint.com/personal/admin_sikorskimuseum_onmicrosoft_com/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin_sikorskimuseum_onmicrosoft_com%2FDocuments%2Fweb_files%2FB_I%2Fb_20d%2Epdf&parent=%2Fpersonal%2Fadmin_sikorskimuseum_onmicrosoft_com%2FDocuments%2Fweb_files%2FB_I&cid=258fcfc3-8491-4cd2-b769-288dc6ddcc95) (accessed: 27 November 2018); W. Parfieniuk, op. cit., p. 43. Aleksander Askansas thus reminisces on his father’s return from captivity: “The physicians were discharged from the temporary camp after a few weeks. When they announced (even before setting up the ghetto) that everyone must surrender any arms they had, my father went to the Gestapo and argued in pure German speech that he was absolutely entitled to keep his sabre. He did not succeed, of course. ‘Zdzisiek, you’ll end up in a camp for that stupid sabre of yours,’ my mother used to say. Why did he go there? I think it was because he was never afraid of anything.” Cf. The account of Aleksander Askansas.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. GBL, Personal File of Zdzisław Askansas, call no. I-1124.



and salaries. The registrations were used as a base for one-time contributions collected from every medical practitioner. The Askanases were, obviously, required to register as well. Zdzisław filled out the questionnaire on 4 June 1940; luckily, the document has been preserved in the collections of the Main Medical Library.<sup>38</sup>

The financial situation of the Askanas family became much worse when the ghetto was closed off. Since they already lived within the future “closed quarter,” they avoided mandatory relocation. The sudden impoverishment of the population greatly affected the functioning of health care as well. Even earlier, the majority of the Jewish population could not afford to pay medical fees, and when the ghetto was set up, poverty quickly became rampant. When the Jewish quarter was locked down on 16 November 1940, there were supposedly about 750 physicians within its walls.<sup>39</sup> Some were employed in hospitals and other facilities run by the Jewish Council, Jewish Social Assistance (ŻSS), and other associations and organizations, whereas others continued to see patients in private. Consultations in public facilities were generally paid for, although fees were not collected from the large majority of patients. The TOZ outpatient clinic charged between 1 and 5 zlotys per visit; home visits were more expensive (7 zlotys for a doctor's visit and 4–5 zlotys for a nurse's).<sup>40</sup>

Physicians also had other opportunities to work and engage in social and educational activities. Both public and clandestine courses and lectures were held. Next to the still-open Nursing School, training was available to physicians, dentists, pharmacists and orderlies. Courses were offered by the TOZ, and sanitary training for home carers started.<sup>41</sup>

Physicians were particularly trained to prepare for and combat epidemics. Such preventive activities in the ghetto were the domain of sanitary doctors, with the Askanases counted among their ranks. Their duties included diagnosing each case of infectious disease, determining the source of infection, isolating the infected in hospitals or apartments, checking whether residential premises had suitable conditions; and disinfecting rooms, bedding, clothing and personal belongings. While on these duties, both spouses contracted epidemic typhus from their patients but managed to overcome the disease.<sup>42</sup> Zdzisław also worked in Jewish hospitals, two of which were located in the ghetto: the Orthodox Jewish

<sup>38</sup> Dr Askanas then had to pay a tax of 66 zlotys in three instalments: 26 zlotys by 10 July, 28 zlotys by 15 August and 14 zlotys by 15 September. Cf. GBL, Personal File of Zdzisław Askanas, call no. I-1124. sb. p.

<sup>39</sup> *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, vol. 29: *Pisma Emanuela Ringelbluma z getta*, ed. J. Nalewajko-Kulikov, Warszawa, 2018, p. 181.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. B. Engelking, J. Leociak, *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście*, Warszawa, 2013, pp. 259–260.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 271–272.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Włodzimierz Berner, “Działalność dozorów/urzędów sanitarnych w Warszawie w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej,” *Przegląd Epidemiologiczny*, 60, 2006, no. 4, p. 839; the account of Alexander Askanas.

Hospital in Czyste (moved from 17 Dworska Street to various edifices<sup>43</sup>), and the Bersohn and Bauman Children's Hospital at 60 Sienna Street/51 Śliska Street. When the Jews were being displaced, both hospitals merged into one until the ghetto was ultimately suppressed following the April 1943 uprising.<sup>44</sup> The conditions prevailing there were atrocious, as evidenced by various accounts: for example, "[f]aced with the raging epidemics of murine typhus, typhoid fever and dysentery, and the ubiquitous diseases caused by famine and cachexia, the hospitals were always overfilled, with each bed shared by two patients, or even four in children's wards. Although the numbers of medical and technical staff (the latter working despite showing symptoms of nutritional oedema) were high, there was a dire shortage of beds, the most necessary medicines, fuel, and even foodstuffs."<sup>45</sup> Until the Czyste hospital was relocated to the ghetto, the physicians working there had to carry passes issued by the Jewish Council. Each sortie beyond the ghetto walls involved the threat of harassment, beating, or even loss of life. Some employees who had no passes were forced to reside on the hospital premises. In early January 1941, the hospital was transferred to the ghetto and renamed the "Czyste" Jewish Hospital for Infectious Diseases.<sup>46</sup> Its financial situation was still critical: there was no money for medicines, food, fuel, clothing, personnel salaries and so on.<sup>47</sup> Zdzisław Askanas worked in the internal ward located at 6/8 Stawki Street, assisting Dr Emil Apfelbaum.<sup>48</sup> Since February 1942, a number of Jewish physicians conducted research to determine the physiological changes caused in human bodies by prolonged hunger. The study, initiated by a team of more than twenty physicians and laboratory workers, focused on the biological and chemical aspects of starvation. The inquiry was carried out on Dr Apfelbaum's ward and in the Bersohn and Bauman Children's Hospital on adult (20–40 years) and minor (6–12 years) patients. In the introduction to the resulting dissertation, the team of physicians explained their decision thus: "*Non omnis moriar* was the call of M.D. Izrael Milejkowski to the desolate streets of the perishing Warsaw ghetto. Thus did a group of Jewish doctors condemned to oblivion, together with their

<sup>43</sup> Surgery and ENT ward – 1 Leszno Street; obstetric and ophthalmologic ward – 4 Tłomackie Street; infectious diseases ward – 86 Żelazna Street; internal, neurology, and dermatology and venereal diseases ward – 8 Stawki Street, administrative buildings, pharmacy, disinfection services – 12 Elektoralna Street. Cf. Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw [hereinafter: AMRW], Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, call no. 202/II-28, "Obecna sytuacja szpitala 'Czyste,'" f. 34.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. B. Engelking, J. Leociak, op. cit., pp. 283–284.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. S. Ernest, *O wojnie wielkich Niemiec z Żydami z Warszawy*, Warszawa, 2003, p. 64.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. M. Ciesielska, *Lekarze getta warszawskiego*, Warszawa, 2017, pp. 172–173.

<sup>47</sup> "The hospital employees receive their quite modest wages with enormous delays." Cf. AMRW, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, call no. 202/II-28, "Obecna sytuacja szpitala 'Czyste,'" ff. 34–34a.

<sup>48</sup> The account of Aleksander Askanas. Emil Apfelbaum (1895–1946) was a specialist in internal diseases and cardiology; following his studies he assisted Professor Witold Orłowski at the Infant Jesus Hospital. Imprisoned in the Warsaw ghetto since 1940. He died in Warsaw and was buried at the Okopowa Street cemetery.

peers, come up with the idea of producing a collective scientific publication.<sup>49</sup> The Warsaw ghetto physicians, living and working in extreme conditions and unable to save their patients, wished to leave a testament to articulate their protest against reality and prove that even in such inhuman conditions one can oppose the enemy and leave a peculiar testimony of a disappearing nation. The doctors taking part in the study collected about 25,000 medical records of patients admitted to both hospitals. This fully representative material allowed a scientific analysis of the features of hunger disease widespread among the ghetto population. The work of the entire team resulted in a unique study entitled *Hunger Disease. Clinical Studies on Hunger in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942*.<sup>50</sup> Askanas co-authored the chapter *Clinical Studies on the Pathology of the Circulatory System in Hunger Cachexia*.<sup>51</sup> Further research efforts were cut short by the July resettlement action. The dissertation typescript was handed to Professor Witold Orłowski, who had it buried on the premises of the Infant Jesus Hospital. Another copy, hidden in the ghetto, was lost.<sup>52</sup> After the war, in 1946, the dissertation was published in print based on the preserved typescript. Only a few of its authors survived the war.<sup>53</sup> Among them was Zdzisław Askanas, who managed to escape the ghetto together with his family. Before they ended up on the Aryan side, however, they went through a severe ordeal.

Rachela Askanas lost both of her parents, who were transported to Treblinka during the first deportation action which started on 22 July 1942,<sup>54</sup> as well as her siblings and many other relatives. Aleksander Askanas recollected that among

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Choroba głodowa. Badania kliniczne nad głodem w getcie warszawskim z roku 1942*, ed. E. Apfelbaum, Warszawa, 1946, p. 4; *Adama Czerniakowa dziennik getta warszawskiego 6 IX 1939–23 VII 1942*, ed. M. Fuks, Warszawa, 1983, p. 296.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. M. Janczewska, "Badania nad głodem w getcie warszawskim – problemy etyczne," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 5, 2009, pp. 327–328.

<sup>51</sup> *Choroba głodowa...*, p. 217.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. B. Engelking, J. Leociak, op. cit., p. 283.

<sup>53</sup> Below is a list of physicians who worked on the *Hunger disease* dissertation, based on an English translation of the book, which contains all names, including those who survived the war (the Polish edition of 1946 only lists war victims): Dr Róża Amzel – died 1943; Dr Emil Apfelbaum – died 1946; Dr Zdzisław Askanas – survived; Dr Owsiej Bielenki – died 1943, Dr Leon Blacher – died 1942, Dr Anna Braude-Heller – died 1943, Dr Chaim Einhorn – survived, Dr Regina Elbinger – died 1943, Dr Szymon Fajgenblat – died 1944, Dr Henryk Fenigstein – survived, Fajga Ferszt – died 1942, Dr Julian Fliederbaum – died 1943, Dr Teodozja Goliborska – survived, Dr Ari Heller – survived, Jerzy Herzekruk – died 1943, Dr Mieczysław Kocen – died 1943, Dr Israel Milejkowski – died 1943, Dr Ryszard Pakszwer – died 1943, Dr Moryc Plonskier – died 1942, Dr Bolesław Raszkes – died 1942, Dr Israel Rotbalsam – survived, Dr Joseph Stein – died 1943, Zuzanna Szejnfinkel – unknown, Dr Mieczysław Szejnman – died 1942, Dr Jicchak Wohl – died 1943, Janina Zarchi – died 1942, Dr Kazimierz Zweibaum – survived. Cf. *Hunger Disease: Studies by the Jewish Physicians in the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed. M. Winick, transl. Martha Osnos, New York, 1979, p. 9; Tomasz Szarota, "Jak zabija głód. Badania nad chorobą głodową w warszawskim getcie," *GW* ['Duży Format' Insert] of 17 February 2009.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. A. Askanas, *Black Swastika...*, pp. 14–15.

the Treblinka victims was his mother's sister, Judyta, and brother, Lutek. Judyta could well have been called a fashion designer now, but back then she was the owner of a tailor's workshop with numerous girls who sewed her newest designs. She was known for smoking one hundred cigarettes per day, finishing not a single one, and drinking a dozen cups of coffee. "Rysio, the son of Stefan [the brother of Aleksander's father – note J.E.], who was one year older than me and my playmate, went missing together with his mother. A countless number of my mother's cousins died; she had a large family in Brześć, where her parents came from, in Russia and, of course, in Warsaw too. Except for us, the sole survivors were Stefan, who was detained in a POW camp,<sup>55</sup> and a distant female cousin of my father who fought in the Warsaw Uprising and somehow came through despite being severely wounded."<sup>56</sup> Ryszard, the five-year-old nephew of Zdzisław, and his mother Tema were among the thousands of Jews brought to the Umschlagplatz – the railway collection point – and sent to Treblinka.<sup>57</sup> Zdzisław's son, Aleksander, recollected two events that stood out in his memory most vividly. One was his visit to the Umschlagplatz. "In the autumn of 1942, when the 'Great Action' was being finalized, after evading the Germans for several months<sup>58</sup> we were seized to be sent to Treblinka. For many hours, we walked down the streets among a crowd of Jews driven to the Umschlagplatz, surrounded by SS men sitting on rikshas and holding machine pistols, Alsatian shepherds at their sides. I was concealed underneath my father's coat to be less conspicuous. Children rarely survived such 'trips.' On the Umschlagplatz, we managed to get into the children's hospital where my mum worked. When we entered, my parents, who were both doctors, put on their white coats. The hospital staff and sick children were safe for now: they were to be the last to be removed. German soldiers and the 'Kalmyks' combed through the facility, pulling everyone else outside to be loaded into cars. My mother had to hide me, a four-year-old boy, somewhere. She strolled rapidly down the corridor, almost running, holding me by the hand, to put me in bed with sick children. A nurse got in her way. 'Where are you going with that boy? they'll kill us all!' she snapped. Mother's face contorted in wild desperation [...] she gave the nurse a powerful backhand slap [...] Pushing her away, she led me to one of the children ward beds, having me lie down next to some small girl

<sup>55</sup> In the Woldenberg POW camp. Cf. *Oflag IIC Woldenberg – to brzmi jak tajemnica*, ed. W. Dembek, Dobięgniew, 2017, pp. 103, 143; J. Olesik, *Oflag IIC Woldenberg*, Warszawa, 1988, pp. 76, 94, 105, 338.

<sup>56</sup> The account of Aleksander Askanas.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Holocaust Survivors and Victims Database*, [https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person\\_advance\\_search.php?NameSearch\\_\\_SourceSrchGrp=&NameSearch\\_\\_ParentSourceId=&NameSearch\\_\\_sort=name\\_primary](https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_advance_search.php?NameSearch__SourceSrchGrp=&NameSearch__ParentSourceId=&NameSearch__sort=name_primary) (accessed: 19 November 2018).

<sup>58</sup> The so-called Great Action lasted from 22 July to 21 September 1942. Aleksander Askanas relates that his father, like many other inhabitants of the ghetto, set up hiding places where the family could lie low while the population was being rounded up. His pride was a hideout arranged in a metal foundry, entered through the bottom of a huge crate formerly used to hold sand.

and covering me with a bed sheet up to the neck. There was nothing strange in this, as many beds were shared by two children.”<sup>59</sup> Another event remembered by Aleksander was the attempt to smuggle him out of the ghetto: “My parents, like the majority of ghetto inhabitants, were intent mainly on saving their children. They found a nurse who had a pass to leave the Umschlagplatz, a rarity in those times. Parents prevailed upon her to take me away. Father brought me out of the hospital and sat me on a high, empty wagon drawn by two horses. In this vehicle, the nurse and I were to leave the hell of the Umschlagplatz for the edges of the ghetto. But when father put me on the wagon, a crowd of Jews driven by Latvians and Kalmyks snatched him, forcing their way towards the cars. Clad in a white medical coat, father was clearly visible against the grey and black mass of doomed figures. My mother desperately wanted to go after him, but someone level-headed stopped her, saying, ‘They will load you and him into different cars and you will die not even seeing each other.’ I was standing high on the wagon and had a clear view of all this. At just four years, I probably did not realize the full extent of the danger, but the idea of entering these cars undoubtedly appeared dreadful. Seized with terror, I could only weep silently. I was there on top of the wagon, feeling very lonely above this sea of misfortune that threatened to swallow my father. He was almost next to the cars, when all of a sudden his white coat started to move back again towards the hospital. Never losing his cool, father walked towards one of the medical checkpoints on the site, taking a sterilizer and a syringe [...] When one of the guards saw a doctor in a white coat, holding a syringe, he let him pass towards the hospital [...] father had to remove me from the wagon, as I did not want to leave my parents.”<sup>60</sup> On occasion, it was possible to smuggle certain individuals out of the Umschlagplatz. Such opportunities were available to Jewish Council employees and Jewish policemen, as well as the medical staff of the hospital, which was located within the Umschlagplatz.<sup>61</sup> “It is enough to put a white coat on someone to lead them out surrounded by other nurses and doctors.”<sup>62</sup> At that time, Zdzisław was most probably employed as a doctor treating workers from the Wiktor Nuss shop located at 33 Muranowska Street.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Cf. O. Askanas, “O naszej tożsamości,” *Stowarzyszenie Dzieci Holocaustu w Polsce*, [http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/szab3.php?s=myionas\\_13.php](http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/szab3.php?s=myionas_13.php), (accessed: 12 October 2018); A. Askanas, “My yiddyshe momme,” *Midrasz*, 2019, no. 2 (208), pp. 96-97.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Stowarzyszenie Dzieci Holocaustu w Polsce*, [http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/szab3.php?s=myionas\\_13.php](http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/szab3.php?s=myionas_13.php), (accessed: 12 October 2018).

<sup>61</sup> From August 1942, the 6/8 Stawki Street address housed the two merged hospitals of “Czyste” and the Bersohn and Bauman Children’s Hospital. Both were included in the Umschlagplatz area. “Exemption from resettlement applies to all Jews who serve as staff in Jewish hospitals or are members of Jewish disinfection teams,” Announcement of the Jewish Council of 22 July 1942, point 1f.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. M. Edelman, *Getto walczy*, Warszawa, 1945, p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Getto Warszawskie*, [http://warszawa.getto.pl/index.php?mod=view\\_record&rid=20011999120004000001&tid=osoby](http://warszawa.getto.pl/index.php?mod=view_record&rid=20011999120004000001&tid=osoby) (accessed: 19 January 2019); the shop itself was located at 31 Muranowska Street and headed by a Jew from the Poznań region who acted as the boss of “Werterfassung,”

## On the “Aryan” side

In March 1943, one month before the uprising broke out, the Askanases managed to escape the ghetto. Getting out of the Jewish quarter and settling down on the “Aryan” side usually required contacts with Poles and other Jews staying outside the ghetto walls.<sup>64</sup> Any escape had to be orchestrated beforehand. Most importantly, one had to procure at least a temporary residence, and later also obtain fake papers. Money was a must to achieve all these purposes: cash was necessary to pay those assisting in the escape, to bribe profiteers, and to cover the cost of lodgings and daily expenses. “Escaping could only succeed for those moneyed, well-connected, blond-haired, blue-eyed people who spoke good Polish and had Polish friends: in short, only a few lucky ones, not ordinary Jews.”<sup>65</sup> Sometimes, also those without the required money and connections managed to slip through to the Aryan side. However, with no friends on the other side of the wall procuring safe quarters and sustenance, it was not easy in the long run. The Askanases also drew on the assistance of fellow Poles. Zdzisław was helped by Jadwiga Zajęc, the wife of Stefan, who was Zdzisław’s commander in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment.<sup>66</sup> She set up a meeting with a man who was to smuggle the family out of the ghetto, help to secure “Aryan” papers and, most importantly, provide shelter. “We fled the ghetto lying covered by a heap of rags in a horse-drawn wagon led by a bribed Wehrmacht soldier.”<sup>67</sup> From then on, Rachela and Aleksander became the Mieczyski family, while Zdzisław also used other surnames, initially calling himself Jan Dębowski, for example.<sup>68</sup> But leaving the ghetto was only the beginning of another struggle for survival in the “secret city,” as Gunnar S. Paulsson called the Jews in hiding and those who helped them and their hunters.<sup>69</sup> Some of the hiding Jews took advantage of organized aid granted by the “Żegota” Council to Aid Jews and the collaborating Jewish organizations: the National Jewish Committee (ŻNK) and the Bund. Askanas was cared for by Lotta Wegmeister, a ŻKN activist.<sup>70</sup> The

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a unit sorting the property of despoiled Jews. Nuss was shot dead during the Ghetto Uprising. Cf. S. Ernest, op. cit., p. 261; A. Meroz, *W murach i poza murami getta. Zapiski lekarki warszawskiej z lat 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 1988, p. 28.

<sup>64</sup> For more on this, see *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, vol. 29a: *Pisma Emanuela Ringelbluma z bunkra*, ed. E. Bergman, T. Epsztejn, M. Siek, Warszawa, 2018, p. 52.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. G.S. Paulsson, *Utajone miasto. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy (1940–1945)*, Kraków, 2007, p. 146.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. A. Askanas, *Black Swastika...*, p. 41.

<sup>67</sup> The account of Aleksander Askanas.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. A. Askanas, *Black Swastika...*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>69</sup> “The secret city that arose in Warsaw was a unique and one-off thing. Its population consisted of 28,000 Jews, some 70,000 to 90,000 of their helpers, and 3,000 to 4,000 profiteers and other dangerous individuals. Cf. G.S. Paulsson, op. cit., pp. 19, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. B. Temkin-Bermanowa, *Dziennik z podziemia*, Warszawa, 2000, p. 168.

family was also helped by the Irena and Feliks Kanabus couple.<sup>71</sup> The Kanabuses had numerous Jewish friends, as they publicly opposed the rampant anti-Semitism, even before the war. Their friendship with the Askanases also dated back to university times.<sup>72</sup> When the war broke out and Jews began to be persecuted, many of them turned to the Kanabuses for help. The spouses sheltered Jews in their house, provided them with fake papers and searched for safe lodgings.<sup>73</sup>

The Jews hiding in Warsaw could try one of two methods to survive: if their appearance and speech clearly marked them as Jewish, they could not leave their hideouts. For weeks and months they sat motionless in their quarters, sometimes in small rooms with no daylight, cellars, cupboards or dugouts. Others not easily recognizable as Jews received new papers and were able to move about and find employment. Zdzisław Askanas, looking like a typical Aryan and highly fluent in German, had a much better chance of survival, unlike his wife, whose typical Semitic features could not be concealed by dyeing her hair to a light colour. Rachela was learning German, sitting in a room behind closed curtains.<sup>74</sup> Zdzisław, who could “surface,”<sup>75</sup> moved about the city and worked to maintain the family, because he managed to find employment in a small chemical (pharmaceutical) facility. Those who “surfaced” were also exposed to various dangers, the most important of which were profiteers, who, taking advantage of the dire situation of the escapees, forced them to pay silence money and informed on the victims when they no longer had any. In the spring of 1944, Zdzisław Askanas was recognized by a janitor from Warsaw University. He managed to elude the black-mailer, but the family had to change their cover again. To play it safe, they resolved

<sup>71</sup> Irena Kanabus (née Budziewiczy, 1911–1994), physician and professor of medical sciences, graduated in medicine from Warsaw University on 27 October 1937, her husband Feliks Zenon Kanabus (1910–1978; code names “Katgut” and “Feliks”), physician and surgeon, graduated in medicine from the Warsaw University on 22 April 1937. Cf. *Rocznik Lekarski RP na 1938 rok*, p. 908; M. Ciesielska, op. cit., p. 271; “Prof. dr med. Irena Kanabus”, *GW* [Warsaw Insert] of 14 November 1994, p. 13; W. Bartoszewski, Z. Lewinówna, *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, Kraków, 1969, pp. 249–253; Aleksander Askanas wrote: “I do not know for certain whether Dr Kanabus was hiding me and my father. Of course, that does not mean it is not true. I was a small child and children are not privy to everything. I remember that I lived with my father for a short time.”

<sup>72</sup> Aleksander Askanas recalls that when the “bench ghetto” was in existence, the Kanabuses used to sit on those benches next to their Jewish friends.

<sup>73</sup> For their acts during the occupation the spouses received the Righteous Among the Nations Israeli decoration: Feliks in 1965 and Irena posthumously in 1995. Cf. <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/pl/historie-pomocy/historia-pomocy-rodzina-kanabusow> (accessed: 27 November 2018).

<sup>74</sup> “We changed our lodgings often,” Aleksander reminisces. “I was living with my mother, who looked ‘bad’ and almost never left the house. Father was tall, blond-haired and blue-eyed; he looked more like a Pole, or even a German. He lived elsewhere and visited us only on occasion. He spoke German like a native, and this saved our lives many times.” Cf. the account of Aleksander Askanas.

<sup>75</sup> This word is used by Emanuel Ringelblum in his essay “Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej,” in: *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, vol. 29a, p. 52.

to put his little son elsewhere. “My parents felt the heat coming down on them [...] they suddenly had to look for a safe place and, absolutely uncertain about their fate, decided to save their son once again,” Aleksander reminisces, “so they brought me to a certain lady, who was of course a Pole, a teacher by profession and living in a suburban house in Grochów with her mother and two-year-old daughter. Her husband had been sent to the camp.”<sup>76</sup> Aleksander, whose expenses were obviously paid for, pretended to be Mrs Sawicka’s nephew. He was lucky to end up in a friendly home. His “aunt” taught the boy to read and write, and he could go out into the garden and play. But for a small child like him, leaving his parents was painful and difficult. The traumatic ghetto memories came back, accompanied by fear and longing for Mum and Dad.<sup>77</sup>

## From the Warsaw Uprising to liberation

The outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 put an end to the “secret city”; the Jews could leave their hiding places. Many of them participated in the struggle, some under assumed names, and some of them fell.<sup>78</sup> Others were reluctant to reveal their identity and joined insurgent troops as Poles.<sup>79</sup> Among the latter was Zdzisław Askanas, who, during the uprising, used the *noms de guerre* “Adam,” “Dąb” and “Lieutenant Janek.” In conspiratorial work, an important role was played by the medical professions: doctors, nurses and students of medicine. During the occupation, health care was run on two levels. On the one hand, municipal, clinical, former military, Polish Red Cross and private hospitals in Warsaw, some of which were reserved exclusively for Germans, continued to be run legally. In parallel, the armed underground was setting up medical services should an uprising break out. Doctors, nurses and other medical staff were deeply immersed in underground activities. They helped and treated both Poles and Jews

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Stowarzyszenie Dzieci Holocaustu w Polsce*, [http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/szab3.php?s=myionas\\_13.php](http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/szab3.php?s=myionas_13.php) (accessed: 12 October 2018). After the war, Askanas tracked down the informer, who was sentenced to three years in prison. Cf. The account of Aleksander Askanas.

<sup>77</sup> The same family, for a few days, was hiding a Jew who was a friend of Alexander’s caretaker. Soon, someone notified the Gestapo, who arrived unexpectedly and started to ransack the house. Fortunately, they did not notice the door to the closet in which coal – and the hunted man – was kept, and things blew over, cf. O. Askanas, op. cit.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. M. Zylberberg, *A Warsaw Diary 1939–1945*, London, 1969, pp. 161–162. Cf. B. Engelking, D. Libionka, *Żydzi w powstaniu Warszawie*, Warszawa, 2009, p. 92.

<sup>79</sup> “Dr Zelikowicz [Józef Żyłkiewicz] worked as an orderly under Dr [Stanisław] Światała, without admitting that he was a physician, in the Boernerowo estate together with her nurse wife under the names of Kazimierz and Maria Sylkiewicz [...] they were greatly afraid of being recognised by combatants from the JCO (Jewish Combat Organisation), who might reveal their identity to other members of the staff.” Cf. E. Kossoy, “Żydzi w powstaniu warszawskim,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* [Paris], 147, 2004, p. 63; <https://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/stanislaw-swital,45532.html> (accessed: 11 February 2019).



hiding from the Germans, and trained personnel for emerging underground battle squads. Medicines and dressings were stored in case of armed action. For this purpose, warehouses of private pharmacies and the Social Insurance Office, depots of the General Care Council (RGO), doctor's offices, infirmaries and even private homes were used. Persons responsible for arranging dressing stations collected surgical tools, dressings and medicines. The exact tasks of health care were set out in the operational order of the Warsaw District Home Army commander, listing hospitals and medical stations which were to be manned by designated individuals if fighting broke out. Each physician was assigned to a particular hospital or medical station in the district.<sup>80</sup> The chief physician of the Warsaw District of ZWZ-AK was initially Colonel Czesław Jaworski, M.D. ("Sas"), and, following his arrest, Henryk Lenk, M.D. ("Bakcyl"). In the September campaign, Lenk was the sanitary chief of the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and then the sanitary chief in the Modlin Defense HQ. Zdzisław Askanas found himself in the W division of "Bakcyl" (Sanitary Service of the Warsaw District of the Home Army), in the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit (Ochota), whose head was Jan Goldman-Zaborowski, M.D. The Ochota sanitary services were divided among three precincts; in each, at least one medical station was to be organized with a staff of two doctors. Askanas was assigned to the first precinct's sanitary station, located in the so-called Kalisz Redoubt between Kaliska, Joteyki, Białobrzaska and Kopińska streets. A large medical station was operating at 9 Kaliska Street at the Nasierowski factory.<sup>81</sup> Following unsuccessful insurgent attacks on buildings occupied by Germans and after losing the connection with the Wola and Śródmieście quarters, about 700 combatants fled Ochota, arriving in the Chojnów forest range. Others, including the Kalisz Redoubt group, who were not notified of the retreat, remained behind. After the insurgents seized the Monopol Tytoniowy buildings at 1 Kaliska Street defended by a German crew on 2 August, a circuit hospital was arranged, as planned earlier, for both soldiers and civilians.<sup>82</sup> As the struggle continued, minor medical stations were swiftly set up in various places. In one of them, at 11 Kaliska Street, Askanas treated civilians from the Śródmieście Południowe quarter.<sup>83</sup> "The Monopol hospital found itself at the heart of battle and was marred with frequent bombardments. On the night of 7/8 August, it was evacuated to private apartments located at 6 and 8 Joteyki

<sup>80</sup> The Ujazdowski hospital, despite switching to civilian status, retained the trappings of a military organisation, and its physicians were addressed according to their military rank, with the hospital director called the commander. Cf. S. Bayer, *Służba zdrowia Warszawy w walce z okupantem 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 1985, p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> 9 Kaliska Street housed a company owned by Leon Nasierowski (1883–1964): Chemiczno-Farmaceutyczne Zakłady Przemysłowo-Handlowe L. Nasierowski (founded in 1934). Cf. <http://www.nasierowski.com/leon-nasierowski> (accessed: 11 February 2019).

<sup>82</sup> Cf. J.K. Wroniszewski, *Ochota 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 1976, p. 621.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. [http://www.tlw.waw.pl/index.php?id=29&newsy\\_id=255](http://www.tlw.waw.pl/index.php?id=29&newsy_id=255) (accessed: 12 October 2018); S. Bayer, *Służba zdrowia Warszawy w walce z okupantem 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 1985, p. 37; M. Wiśniewska, M. Sikorska, *Szpital powstańczej Warszawy*, Warszawa, 1991.

Street, some 50 wounded being placed there. On 8 August, while the redoubt positions were being fired upon, a shell exploded near the 9 Kaliska Street building. The damage was so great that in the evening the wounded were moved from the Nasierowski factory to a two-storey house of the Sokołowski brothers at 5 Joteyki Street and other premises on the same street at numbers 2, 4, 6 and 7. When the Kalisz Redoubt fell, the Germans set fire to the 5 Joteyki Street building housing the severely wounded, and several dozen died in the flames. The lighter wounded and nurses from the Kalisz Redoubt ended in the Pruszków camp together with other civilians.<sup>84</sup> The Kalisz Redoubt fell on 10 August, but already on the 5<sup>th</sup> the Germans had rounded up the quarter's inhabitants into the so-called Zieleniak, a true valley of tears for all those confined there. A square measuring a few hectares at 95 Grójecka Street, Zieleniak had previously been used as a marketplace for fruits and vegetables. During the uprising, the Germans set up a temporary camp there, only to move its inmates to another temporary camp in Pruszków. "People, many of them elderly, women and children, crowded there without access to sanitary facilities, water and shelter from the elements. On certain days, the size of the crowd could reach 20,000."<sup>85</sup> Zieleniak became the site of mass crimes, rapes and brutal murders committed by RONA soldiers commanded by Mieczysław Kamiński.<sup>86</sup> RONA demonstrated particular cruelty towards the population of Ochota and the Staszic and Lubecki colonies.<sup>87</sup> The next stage in the journey was the Warsaw West station, where columns of the expelled were driven and awaited transport to a camp. Askanas went that way, too. Together with his wife, on 13 August he left the city through Warsaw West and arrived in Pruszków. "Stasia [Merenholc] noticed that one of our fellow sufferers, Dr Askanas, [...] had put on a white coat and started to go about his medical duties."<sup>88</sup> The Germans, unable to staff the camp with their own personnel, allowed Poles to work there. On 11 August, a German medical committee was set up to sift through the population and choose those capable of working, who were to be moved to Germany. The committee released doctors, provided that they would work in the camp. As it turned out, however, a group of Polish doctors was also removed to Germany, because "we also need doctors there," the Germans said.<sup>89</sup> Afraid of

<sup>84</sup> Cf. M. Janaszek-Seydlitz, "Służba sanitarna w powstaniu warszawskim. Ochota," *Stowarzyszenie Pamięci Powstania Warszawskiego 1944*, [http://www.sppw1944.org/index.html?http://www.sppw1944.org/powstanie/sanitariat\\_04.html](http://www.sppw1944.org/index.html?http://www.sppw1944.org/powstanie/sanitariat_04.html) (accessed: 13 December 2018). Z. Namitkiewicz, "Relacja o sanitariacie," in: *Ludność cywilna w powstaniu warszawskim*, vol. 1, Warszawa, 1974, pp. 207–214.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. S. Bayer, op. cit., p. 90; S. Kopf, *Powstańcze służby sanitarne*, Warszawa, 2004, pp. 35–36.

<sup>86</sup> The RLA (Russian Liberation Army) was a collaborationist formation of Russian prisoners of war and volunteers which fought alongside the German army in World War Two.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. W. Bartoszewski, *859 dni Warszawy*, Kraków, 1974, pp. 591, 602–603.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. B. Temkin-Bermanowa, op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. K. Drescher, "Działalność polskiego sanitariatu i komisji lekarskiej w obozie Pruszków," in: *Exodus Warszawy. Ludzie i miasto po powstaniu 1944*, vol. 1, Warszawa, 1992, pp. 57, 61.

being deported and forced to work for the Reich, Zdzisław fled the Pruszków camp with his wife. In this they were probably aided by a pass granted to physicians working in the facility, allowing them to move about the camp unhindered, or even leave it.<sup>90</sup> Having escaped from Pruszków, Askanas helped the insurgents once again, this time by setting up General Care Council hospitals in areas occupied by Germany. In the organization structure of the Home Army sanitary services, the 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit included the Warsaw County outside the city limits and was divided into eight precincts. The network of hospitals around Warsaw assumed the brunt of care for wounded and sick insurgents evacuated from the city as the Germans reoccupied one quarter after another, and the uprising collapsed on 3 October 1944. The circuit field hospital in Łuszczewo belonged to the 8<sup>th</sup> Circuit, Łęgów-Łomianki, which consisted of seven sanitary precincts. It operated legally under the auspices of the Milanówek GCC, which supplied it with medicines and bed linen. The institution was located on the estate of Aniela Kapuścińska, who converted a part of her manor into a hospital. Bunk beds for the sick were made from wooden planks. The hospital housed two wards, one for men, with more than a dozen beds, and another for women, with ten. From the middle of August 1944, it was managed by Dr Jan Netzer, and later by Zdzisław Askanas under the name Jan Dąb or Jan Dembowski, posing as a medical student. The personnel also included Anatol and Barbara Kuźniec, who were physicians from the same 1<sup>st</sup> precinct medical station in which Askanas served during the uprising and later belonged to the Monopol Tytoniowy insurgent hospital staff. The Łuszczewo hospital admitted insurgents, refugees from Warsaw, village inhabitants and wounded guerrilla fighters from the Kampinos forest group. The sick and wounded from the hospital at the Perełka house and the field hospital in Krogulec were also sent there. Some of the patients were women hiding from marauding Russian Liberation Army soldiers. The latter frequently swooped upon the hospital, because it had a stock of spirits that the bandits were eager to get their hands on. The facility was directly subordinated to a Błonie physician but often visited without warning by inspecting German doctors. The staff were warned of their “raids” by a phone call from the Błonie hospital and immediately evacuated the guerrilla patients. Due to the steady influx of sick and wounded, it was necessary to find a location for another medical facility.<sup>91</sup> Wiktor Jaworski recalls that “after the Błonie hospital was set up, I was visited by trusted acquaintances together with an unknown individual who was introduced as Doctor Jan. They asked me to obtain consent from German authorities to set up a hospital on the Gawartowa Wola estate (nearer the Kampinos Forest) for the needs of insurgents. Following an application of the

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. B. Budzyński, “Moje wspomnienia,” in: *Powstanie Warszawskie i medycyna*, vol. 1, ed. A. Danysz, Warszawa, 2002, [http://www.tlw.waw.pl/index.php?id=30&newsy\\_id=356](http://www.tlw.waw.pl/index.php?id=30&newsy_id=356) (accessed: 13 December 2018).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. M. Janaszek-Seydlitz, op. cit.; The account of Aleksander Askanas.

Committee [The Polish Care Committee, Błonie Branch, of the GCC] we received such consent as a division of the Błonie hospital.”<sup>92</sup> This “Doktor Jan” must have been Askanas, who became the head of the new hospital moved from Łuszczewo to Gawartowa Wola. Its staff also included Alina Mieczysłowska (the *nom de guerre* of Rachela Askanas) as a paediatric nurse. The hospital started admitting patients in late October 1944, and the Askansas worked there until the liberation of Warsaw. On the following day, 18 January 1945, they reached Grochów and retrieved their son Aleksander. The family was reunited again.<sup>93</sup>

## After the war

Zdzisław Askanas began his post-war career in February 1945 as a military physician in the rank of captain at the Health Care Department of the Ministry of National Defence (79 Koszykowa Street). On 22 September 1945, he registered with the Regional Jewish Committee in Warsaw.<sup>94</sup> In January 1946, Askanas was discharged to reserve status in the rank of major, and on 17 February filed an application with the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CKŻP) for material support (asking for clothing), because “I need civilian clothes to start a private practice and live as a civilian – I have no spare garments for my military uniform.” One month later, the Social Care Department of the CKŻP assigned Askanas a set of clothes, including a coat, suit, shoes and other articles.<sup>95</sup>

In 1946, he became deputy director of the Department of Pharmacy and Procurement at the Ministry of Health and Social Care. Soon, he made a name for himself as a talented organizer and logistics manager, and was accordingly entrusted with rebuilding medical institutions. At the same time, he worked at the Ministry of Health infirmary.<sup>96</sup> Following his passion for medical research,

<sup>92</sup> Wiktor Jaworski, an engineer living in Błonie, head of the local GCC: id., “Wspomnienia z działalności RGO,” in: *Exodus Warszawy. Ludzie i miasto po powstaniu 1944*, vol. 1, Warszawa, 1992, p. 700.

<sup>93</sup> Like other exiles returning to the Polish capital, the Askansas crossed the Vistula by walking on ice. All bridges, with the exception of a wooden floating crossing reserved for Red Army soldiers, were destroyed (the account of Aleksander Askanas).

<sup>94</sup> Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw [hereinafter: AŻIH], Wydział Ewidencji i Statystyki CKŻP, call no. 303/V, unit 427, f. 825; Askanas, as one of several military physicians employed at the Health Care Department of the Ministry of National Defence, probably asked the CKŻP after registration for financial support and loan of medical equipment necessary to set up a private doctor office. Cf. AŻIH, Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej przy CKŻP, call no. 324, unit 487, f. 121.

<sup>95</sup> An application addressed to the CKŻP shows that Askanas and his family at that time lived at 50/1 Mokotowska Street. Cf. AŻIH, Wydział Opieki Społecznej CKŻP, call no. 303/VIII, unit 150, f. 75.

<sup>96</sup> He was personal physician to Władysław Gomułka, among others. Cf. *Władysław Gomułka i jego epoka*, ed. E. Salwa-Syzdek, T. Kaczmarek, Warszawa, 2005, p. 330 ; T. Torańska, *Byli*, Warszawa, 2006, p. 89.

however, he returned to the Second Clinic of Internal Diseases of the Faculty of Medicine at Warsaw University (renamed the Medical University in 1950), headed by Professor Mściwoj Semerau-Siemianowski, at whose side he had taken his first steps as a young doctor. In 1950, he earned a PhD in medicine and one year later, a post-doctoral qualification. In October 1953, he became the head of the newly formed Fourth Clinic of Internal Diseases of the Medical University. He was surrounded by a group of talented and ambitious students who shared the enthusiasm and diligence of their master, who received the academic degree of professor in June 1954. He organized and led a team of future researchers, organized training sessions and educational workshops, helped in preparation for difficult examinations during test prep courses which lasted for hours, and supervised rehearsals of public speeches and revisions of scientific publications. Askanas was remembered by his students as “not just a teacher, but nearly a father to all his assistants. Loyal towards his students, he often agreed with their viewpoints in scientific discussions instead of sticking to his beliefs.”<sup>97</sup> Even so, he was an exacting teacher: he made his disciples take additional classes, write publications, specialize and obtain academic degrees. “He taught us in equal measure medicine and elegance. We had to know how to deliver a speech and what clothes to wear.” Yet the professor never questioned the authority of his charges or shared his observations when a patient was present. To students who earned their PhDs he gifted silver pins, cuff-links or tie-pins with engraved graduation dates. These gifts were usually distributed at a joint dinner.<sup>98</sup> Led by Askanas, the medical team conducted scientific research in cardiology. The professor organized thematic groups and diagnostic workshops focusing on diagnosing and treating coronary artery diseases, myocardial infarction, hypertension, peripheral artery diseases, and heart changes in scleroderma and muscular atrophy. Such were the beginnings of Askanas's school of cardiology. He himself became Poland's first national consultant in cardiology, formerly treated as the province of internal medicine. Thanks to his efforts, from the late 1950s selected medical facilities (hospitals) in Poland started to be furnished with modern cardiac equipment, leading to the establishment of intensive cardiac care units. Askanas himself assisted these efforts, visiting one town after another. In the late 1960s, more units of this kind existed in Poland than in Austria or France. In 1961, his exertions led to the establishment of the first Polish Central Clinic of Circulatory Diseases, while 1963 saw the opening of the Intensive Cardiac Care Ward (ICCW), one of the first in the world, and 1965 the transformation of the Fourth Internal Diseases Clinic into the Institute of Cardiology, of which Askanas became the director. The pioneer research carried out by the clinic in areas such

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. J. Borowicz, “Profesorowie,” *Puls. Biuletyn Okręgowej Izby lekarskiej w Warszawie*, 2003, no. 2003/02, <https://izba-lekarska.pl/numer/numer-200302/profesorowie/> (accessed: 13 December 2018).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. T. Urzykowski, *op. cit.*; J. Borowicz, *op. cit.*

as intensive cardiac care, electrotherapy, electrophysiology and cardiac rehabilitation had earned the facility international fame and renown, leading to Professor Askanas's appointment as an expert in cardiac rehabilitation and epidemiology of circulatory diseases by the World Health Organization. The clinic trained physicians both from Poland and other Eastern-Bloc countries. Using their experiences from the ICCW, doctors set up a so-called hospital-wide emergency patrol summoned by phone to patients in need of reanimation. The output of this work is also found in Askanas's monograph on cardiac reanimation, *Reanimacja kardiologiczna*, co-written with his son Aleksander, also a cardiologist, the first publication of its kind in Poland.<sup>99</sup> The book rapidly won approval both nationally and abroad and became a popular medical textbook. In total, Askanas authored more than 180 publications, and supervised 26 doctoral dissertations and four post-doctoral dissertations in medicine, some of which were defended after his death. His lifelong ambition was to raise societal awareness of the threat posed by heart diseases and the related preventive efforts. He wrote screenplays for educational films and organized nationwide campaigns such as the "Month of the Heart" and "Week of the Heart." His attitude earned him the respect and gratitude of patients. He was known for bringing flowers to those who celebrated their birthdays on his ward.<sup>100</sup> His patients included many celebrities. Aleksander Wat, for whom Askanas was both physician and friend, dedicated to him the poem *Trzy sonety* published in 1956 in the *Wiersze* volume.<sup>101</sup> In 1953, the poet developed Wallenberg's syndrome (lateral medullary syndrome), a disease causing, among other things, persistent and severe pain. The incurable disease led Wat to commit suicide after 14 years of suffering. It is no wonder, therefore, that he dedicated his poem to Askanas. No one could understand pain and suffering more than a doctor – and a friend as well.

*Prof. dr Zdzisławowi Aksanasowi*

1

Trzy sonety

Spać. Choćby dopełnić się miało,  
na co czekano z drżeniem od wieków zarania.  
Jak senny, jak uchylny jest duch i ciało  
w godzinie rozstania.

<sup>99</sup> A. Askanas, Z. Askanas, *Reanimacja kardiologiczna*, Warszawa, 1967.

<sup>100</sup> K. Tymińska, K.J. Filipiak, G. Opolski, op. cit., pp. 4–5.

<sup>101</sup> "You have managed your life poorly,' I was told after the war by my wise doctor, Professor Askanas, to whom I owe so much and who roughly but firmly led me through the most critical stage of my illness. And he was right." Cf.: A. Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony. Część druga*, interviews and preface by Cz. Miłosz, Warszawa, 1990, p. 73.

Spać. Spać w tym obcym ogrodzie,  
gdzie Mistrz nasz łka i kona, od wszystkich opuszczony.  
Sieci rzucone na brzeg, na wodzie śpią łodzie,  
w drzewach wiatr uśpiony.

Spać. Przespać wieczność całą,  
śmierć i zmartwychwstanie, piekło i zbawienie.  
Albo potępienie.

Kiedy mnie obudził, oko tylko spojrzało.  
Ręce były umarłe, usta oniemiały,  
Serce skamieniało.

2

Czarno. W świątyni zasłona rozdarta.  
Kości rzucone w piasek. I gąbka octem upita.  
Sen, sen kamienny bez snów spadł na wartę.  
(Czy nigdy już tu nikomu dzień nie zaświta?)

Jak ciepło. Noc wygwieżdżona. Iście  
Kwietniowa noc to. Czarom jej poddani  
Nie drgną ludzie, nie zadrzą liście.  
(Eli, Eli, lamma sabahtani.)

Cicho. Szakał tylko z pustyni zaszczeka.  
Kur zmyłony zapieje. I znów jest cicho, błogo.  
(Nikt stąd nie odejdzie? nikt nie przyjdzie tą drogą?)

Gdy ciszę dziko rozdarł głos człowieka:  
sama śmiertelnie senna, w ciżbie śpiących ludzi,  
Matka usypia Syna, kiedy się zbudził z krzykiem.

3

Do grobu złożył Go mąż z Arymatei  
i nakrył ciosowym kamieniem.  
I siadł na pokucie, by płakać nadziei,  
która jest-że tylko złudzeniem?

W nocy przybiegły dwa serafiny.  
Odwalili kamień i rzekli: Wstań, Panie!  
i rękę podali, by wstał i szedł z nimi,  
żeby się spełniło Boże zmartwychwstanie.

Nie wstanę! – rzekł do nich. – Nie wstanę dopóty,  
dopóki i człowiek nie będzie wyzwolony  
od śmierci i bólu.

Od dawna już Józef ów powstał z pokuty.  
I w proch już obrócon... A On ciągle czeka  
na wyzwolenie człowieka.

Vence, wrzesień 1956

Another of Askanas' patients was Leon Pasternak, who dedicated his *Strofy gniewu* (1949) poetry volume to him, saying, "To doctor Zdzisław Askanas, the saviour of my body and soul, Leon Pasternak, with deep gratitude."<sup>102</sup>

In March 1968, political events once again affected the lives of the Askanas family. The communist-inspired bashing of the already sparse Jewish diaspora struck fear into those who had experienced war, the German occupation and the Holocaust persecutions. It is no wonder that many of them, concerned about their own safety and that of their families, decided to move abroad. Staff from Professor Askanas's clinic who left Poland included, among others, the first doctoral student of the Fourth Internal Diseases Clinic, Dr Barbara Tenenbaum (to Israel) and Dr Cecylia Słucka (to Sweden). Zdzisław's son, Aleksander, also moved permanently to the United States. As he wrote later, "Is it not an irony of fate that the last, final stage of Jewish migration affected a group of people most intimately tied to Poland? That the anti-Semitic wave of 1968 has exiled us, the most Polonized Jews?"<sup>103</sup> It must be added that this group was largely assimilated and strongly connected to Poland with professional, social and oftentimes family ties, with many of its members living in inter-faith marriages, for whom the decision to migrate was a very difficult experience. It was also a group ranked among the elites due to their education and social position.<sup>104</sup>

Ultimately, Zdzisław Askanas and his wife decided not to leave Poland. Once again, they had to face the feeling of being unwanted strangers branded merely for their nationality. Zdzisław paid a high price for these stressful times. In the summer of 1973, he suffered an extensive stroke and, after being treated in the

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Auction catalogue of Antykwariat TOM of 24 March 2018, item 140, [http://www.portolan.pl/katalogi/2018-03-24\\_TOM.pdf](http://www.portolan.pl/katalogi/2018-03-24_TOM.pdf) (accessed: 6 January 2019).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. "Dlaczego tak późno," *Forum Żydów Polskich*, <http://www.fzp.net.pl/marzec-68/dlaczego-tak-pozno> (accessed: 23 November 2018); A. Latocha, "Literackie (po)głosy emigracji niedokonanej – tożsamościowe definicje polskich Żydów, którzy nie wyjechali po Marcu'68," in: *Pęknięcia, granice, przemiany. Tożsamościowe transgresje w literaturze XX i XXI wieku*, ed. J. Wróbel, Kraków, 2013, pp. 170–171.

<sup>104</sup> "Against all migrants from Poland or the entire Polish population, the March 1968 exiles were an extraordinary group. At first sight, they appear highly educated: the percentage of university graduates and students among them was eight times (!) larger than in the entire population. Most of them were engineers, physicians, and economics or humanities graduates" (cf. D. Stola, *Emigracja pomarcowa*, Warszawa, 2000, p. 11). Those who applied to leave included 171 doctors from Warsaw. This group included, besides Aleksander Askanas, also other Institute of Cardiology employees, such as Barbara Tenenbaum. Cf. K. Tymińska, K.J. Filipiak, G. Opolski, op. cit., p. 5.



government hospital at Emilii Plater Street, whose consultant he had been for quarter of a century, died on 25 September 1974. He was buried in the military section of the Powązki cemetery. Each 17 January, the former students of the professor meet at his grave to commemorate the day on which the Fourth Internal Diseases Clinic of the University of Medicine was opened in the 8<sup>th</sup> pavilion of the Infant Jesus Hospital in Lindleya Street.

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To summarize these notes, I would like to thank Professor Dr Krzysztof J. Filipiak, M.D., who inspired me to work on a biography of Zdzisław Askanas, an eminent doctor, cardiologist and witness to the Holocaust. My thanks also go to Dr Aleksander Askanas, M.D., who provided me with much valuable information on the life of his father.

## Abstract

Zdzisław Askanas was a scion of a known and relatively well-off Jewish family which settled in the city of Płock in the mid-eighteenth century. The Askanas family produced a number of notable personages in various fields of science and culture, among them Kazimierz Askanas (1909–1994), a Płock regional activist; Stefan Askanas (1908–1972), the executive director of the International Poznań Fair; cardiologist Aleksander Askanas (1938–); and economist Wiktor Askanas.

Zdzisław completed his medical studies at the Warsaw University Faculty of Medicine (1929–1935). Following his graduation, he worked under the supervision of two eminent internal medicine specialists: Professor Mściwoj Semerau-Siemianowski (1885–1953), at the Saint Lazarus Hospital in Warsaw, and Professor Jakub Węgierko (1889–1960), at the Saint Stanislaus Hospital for Infectious Diseases. He took part in the September campaign of 1939, stayed together with the family in the Warsaw ghetto and, following his escape, hid in Warsaw. As a physician, he participated in the Warsaw Uprising and organized hospitals for insurgents. After the war, he was one of the most important doyens of modern Polish cardiology, a university professor, and founder of the First Cardiology Chair and Clinic at the Medical University in Warsaw.

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