THE EXHIBITION
"AUSCHWITZ. NOT LONG AGO. NOT FAR AWAY."
IN KANSAS CITY.
LUIS FERREIRO AWARDED WITH
THE "LIGHT OF REMEMBRANCE"

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We invite all of you to work closely with us. We would be grateful to receive information about events, projects, publications, exhibitions, conferences or research that we should share with our readers. We also accept proposals for articles.

Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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The IHRA has successfully concluded its first plenary meetings under the Greek Presidency, guided by the priorities of advancing Holocaust education and countering Holocaust distortion. Hosted online from Athens, over 250 experts, political representatives, and representatives of civil society met over two weeks to discuss the latest developments in the field of education, remembrance, and research of the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma.

In his welcome address, Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias emphasized the continued relevance of the Holocaust and its lessons for today. “We do not want to see the memory of the Holocaust as an echo of the past,” he said. “We see it as a living reality and a force for the preservation and advancement of our freedom and our way of life. [...] The memory of the Holocaust can be a shield of 21st century democracy.”

Secretary General for Greeks Abroad and Public Diplomacy John Chrysoulakis emphasized the importance of Holocaust education in his address to the Plenary. “As fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors—eyewitnesses to the genocide—are alive to share the lessons of the Holocaust and speak the truth, a sound education about the Holocaust is more indispensable than ever, especially in our current media environment, which allows Holocaust distortion and antisemitism to flourish,” he said.

IHRA Chair Ambassador Chris J. Lazaris echoed these sentiments in his opening remarks. “We are united in our continuous commitment to a fact-based approach and to ensuring the truth prevails, both today and for future generations,” he stressed. The IHRA Chair underlined the importance of promoting the IHRA’s useful practical tools to help in this effort, such as the recently published Recognizing and Countering Holocaust Distortion: Recommendations for Policy and Decision Makers and the #ProtectTheFacts social media campaign, both of which have received overwhelming support.

At a time of increased antisemitism around the world, the IHRA adopted by consensus a statement strongly condemning recent antisemitic violence and hate speech in response to the escalation of violence in the Middle East in May 2021, emphasizing that “while freedoms of speech and protest are essential pillars of all democracies, nothing can justify hate speech.”

The IHRA’s expert Committee on the Genocide of the Roma was tasked with the drafting of Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Genocide of the Roma, which will provide an impactful tool for governments and organizations around the world to counter anti-Roma sentiment.

The Plenary also welcomed the Republic of Cyprus as a new Observer Country. The IHRA now consists of 34 Member Countries, 1 Liaison Country, 8 Observer Countries, and 8 Permanent International Partners.

In addition, the Plenary confirmed that the UK will take on the Presidency of the IHRA in 2024, for the third time in the alliance’s history.

The IHRA’s experts in its Working Group and Committees dealt closely with the impact of the pandemic on the field and a number of other issues. In their meetings, they investigated the resurgence of nationalism and its effect on research, online education on the Holocaust, Holocaust distortion on the internet, the pandemic’s effect on memorials and museums, digital remembrance, new forms of antisemitism.
memorials and museums, digital remembrance, new forms of antisemitism related to the pandemic, and the safeguarding of sites and commemoration of the victims of the genocide of Roma.

Special features and events also included the screening of the documentary film “The Song of Life” by Tony Lykouressis, and guided virtual tours of important Jewish sites in Athens and the Acropolis Museum.

Recognizing and Countering Holocaust Distortion

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS
THE EXHIBITION "AUSCHWITZ. NOT LONG AGO. NOT FAR AWAY." IN KANSAS CITY. LUIS FERREIRO AWARDED WITH THE "LIGHT OF REMEMBRANCE"

On June 14th, the day which marks the anniversary of the first transport of Polish prisoners to German Auschwitz camp and specially for this occasion, at Union Station in Kansas City in the USA, the exhibition “Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away” was inaugurated, prepared by the Auschwitz Memorial and the Spanish company Musealia. During the inauguration ceremony Luis Ferreiro, Director of Musealia, was awarded with the “Light of Remembrance”, the most important distinction of the Auschwitz Memorial.

The exhibition traces the development of Nazi ideology and tells the transformation of an ordinary Polish town of Oświęcim where during the occupation, the German Nazis created the largest concentration camp and extermination center—at which some 1 million Jews, and tens of thousands of others, were murdered.

Victims included Polish political prisoners, Sinti and Roma, Soviet POWs, and other groups persecuted by Nazi ideology, such as: disabled, asocials, Jehovah's Witnesses or homosexuals. In addition, the exhibition contains artifacts that depict the world of the perpetrators—SS men who created and operated the largest of the German Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

"The exhibition, based on hundreds of authentic artifacts, with the most of them coming from the Collections of the Auschwitz Memorial, makes its visitors realize how important it is nowadays to reflect on the responsibility for the world we live in and it refers mainly to those who have not had the opportunity to come to the Museum themselves. The propaganda of German Nazis coincided with the frustration in German society. Today we experience difficult times as well and at any time, some expression of xenophobia, racism, antisemitism, or hatred in general, may too easily get out of our control“, said Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński, Director of the Museum, who took part in the inauguration of the exposition.

"Auschwitz did not start with gas chambers. Hatred does not happen overnight; it builds up slowly among people. It does so with words and thoughts, with small everyday acts, with prejudices. When we had the vision to create the exhibition, we conceived its narrative as an opportunity to understand better how such a place could come to exist, and as a warning of where hatred can take us to. Therefore, it is of vital importance to remember the road that led to Auschwitz and the consequences it had," said Luis Ferreiro, the director of Musealia.

"Everyone who sees this exhibit will see something that will stay with them. For me it was a little shoe with a sock tucked inside. A little boy placed it there, so he would have it when he came back. That little boy would now be in his 80s. Where would he be today? What would he have done with his life? He would have grandchildren now. I can’t forget that little shoe and sock. It stays with me.\"", said...
said Ronald S. Lauder, Chairman of the US-founded Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation and President World Jewish Congress.

“Union Station is a visual symbol and important space within Kansas City. Exhibitions that we host are of particular importance for preserving our history and mission and our voice is strong. Presenting the “Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away” to our vast and diversified community is one of the greatest honours that we can imagine”, said George Guastello, President and Director General of Union Station.

“Hundreds of thousands of American soldiers passed by Union Station on their way to the fronts of two world wars. After the wars, the building witnessed numerous comebacks and reunions. After WW2 we helped in welcoming Holocaust Survivors in their new home, right here, in the Midwest. Our history is full of humility and honour”, he added.

During the inauguration of the exhibition, Director Cywiński awarded Luis Ferreiro with the “Light of Remembrance”, the greatest distinction of the Auschwitz Memorial for the most meritorious individuals in the field of education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust.

“Luis Ferreiro achieved the unusual thing – he has built the biggest travelling exhibition devoted to Auschwitz in history. It was presented in Madrid, then in New York and today, on June 14th, it was opened in Kansas City. The number of visitors in these three locations will probably exceed one million. It shows the great educational potential of the events that take place not only at the Memorial, but also over the world, outside the authentic space of the former camp all. This is a great project from this point of view and the exhibition constitutes as well one of the biggest educational programs dedicated to the history of Auschwitz in the last decades”, said Piotr Cywiński.
“Great involvement, sensitivity and dedication of Luis Ferreiro fully justify the granting of this award. I am personally pleased by the fact that we are awarding this distinction to the representative of a much younger generation than previous recipients of the award”, he emphasized.

The “Light of Remembrance” has so far been awarded to: Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, Krystyna Oleksy, Avner Shalev, Serge Klarsfeld and Sara J. Bloomfield

On almost 2 thousand square meters the visitors of Union Station will be able to see hundreds of artifacts from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum including personal items—such as suitcases, eyeglasses, and shoes—that belonged to survivors and victims of Auschwitz. Other artifacts include concrete posts that were part of the fence of the Auschwitz camp; fragments of an original barrack for prisoners from the Auschwitz III-Monowitz camp; a desk and other possessions of the first and the longest serving Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss; a gas mask used by the SS; Pablo Picasso’s Lithograph of Prisoner.

An original German-made Model 2 freight wagon used for the deportation of Jews to the ghettos and extermination camps in occupied Poland will be placed in front of the Union Station building.

The exhibition “Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away” was created by Musealia in cooperation with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Curators of this unique exposition are world-class experts: Dr. Robert Jan van Pelt, Dr. Michael Berenbaum and Paul Salmons, who cooperated closely with historians and curators from the Auschwitz Museum Research Center led by Dr. Piotr Setkiewicz.

The exhibition won the Grand Prix of the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra 2020 Award. It is the most prestigious European distinction in the field of heritage. The project also won the second place in the Public Choice Award.

Lily Ebert, 97, hit the milestone on the site this week, on the account she runs with her great-grandson, Dov Forman, who is seventeen. The pair’s channel sees Lily answer questions about her experiences at the infamous camp, spreading Holocaust awareness to a younger generation.

“I enjoy making every video with Dov,” said Lily. “I think it is very important and I am proud of the work we are doing in order to ensure the Holocaust, and in particular my testimony, is never forgotten.

“Even after liberation I never thought I would be able to have children, let alone 34 great grandchildren, so I love making the videos with Dov where we show family moments – family is so important to me and I feel so lucky to have such a loving family around me.”

Lily was 14 when the Nazis deported her from Bonyhad, Hungary to Auschwitz with her mother, brother and three sisters. On arrival, her mother Nina, brother Bela and sister Berta were sent to the gas chambers. She never saw them again.

Dov Forman, Lily’s great-grandson, said he believed social media could be a force for good, providing education about the Holocaust and subsequent genocides to a new generation.

“I feel incredibly proud to be helping her reach millions of people online,” he said.

“A few months ago she did not even know what TikTok was so it really is incredible that our account has almost reached 1 million followers.

“As the number of survivors dwindles with time and we move further away from the Holocaust, it is our responsibility to internalise the testimonies from survivors and to share them.”

A book about Lily’s experiences, called Lily’s Promise: How I Survived Auschwitz and Found the Strength to Live has been co-written between Lily and Dov, and will be published on 2nd September by Pan Macmillan. It is available to pre-order.
W new exhibition of works by Wilhelm Sasnal, one of the most outstanding contemporary Polish artists, opened at POLIN Museum. The exhibition presents the artist’s paintings and drawings which depict a familiar albeit somewhat remote landscape and well-known figures against it. They show a landscape in the wake of the Shoah.

The exhibition is part of POLIN Museum program activities in which artists explore the history, culture and legacy of Polish Jews.

Even though Wilhelm Sasnal’s artworks have received wide international acclaim, they are rarely exhibited in Poland - the last big show took place at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw in 2007. The exhibition at POLIN Museum will be the first individual presentation of the artist’s oeuvre at a Polish museum, and will include the works completed over the course of the past two decades. It will be a major event in contemporary art, both in Poland and globally. The exposition will feature artworks on loan from the artist himself, as well as those from public and private collections in Poland (including the POLIN Museum collection) and internationally.

Sasnal’s works are included in the most renowned collections in the world, among them: Museum of Modern Art and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Tate Modern in London, Centre Pompidou in Paris, Sprengel Museum in Hannover, Fondation Beyeler in Riehen, Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The artist held individual exhibitions at, among others, Kunsthalle Zürich, Camden Arts Centre and Whitechapel Gallery in London, K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Dusseldorf or Haus der Kunst in Munich. He also participated in numerous collective exhibitions across the globe.

Wilhelm Sasnal’s work has been inspired by visual information derived from various sources and contexts, including the mass media: television, Internet, and the press. Sasnal draws inspiration also from works by other artists whom he considers important and, obviously, from photography. His art deals with everyday life and with social processes; it tells the story of growing up at a time of political transformation from actually existing socialism to a new brave world of capitalism, of the politics of commemoration, and of settling accounts with the past. The artist demonstrates how his generation copes with the surrounding reality, in which wartime and postwar history remain constantly present. For over a decade now, Sasnal has also been making films, both shorts and full-length. Anka Sasnal, the artist’s wife, is the films’ co-author.

The relation between the eye and the memory, the touching and the forgetting, searching for a language and losing the ability to speak—these opposing yet often coinciding experiences refer us to a forlorn territory, the one that has been repressed: the realm of shame and curiosity. What lies beyond this blind wall? Seeking answers to this question, Sasnal pursues the path of works that negotiate the representation of the Holocaust as recorded in material and memorized images as well as in witness testimonies, such as Art Spiegelman’s comic book "Maus", Claude Lanzmann’s documentary "Shoah", or Tadeusz Borowski’s short stories.

When asked why the Jewish topics - and the Holocaust in particular - are so important to him, Sasnal responds: "It stems from a subconscious sense of loss which is extremely hard to define. Perhaps it also stems from the
WYSTAWA CZASOWA

WILHELM SASNAL
TAKI PEJZAŻ

KURATOR: ADAM SZYMczyk

17.06.2021–10.01.2022
sense of guilt which has been instilled in me - a Pole brought up in the Christian tradition. To be sure, I did not choose Jewish topics out of sentiment, but rather out of my own personal concern. Now it all seems easier to me, for I have processed those issues, I have named them. Jan Tomasz Gross was right when he said: ‘Poles should deal with this for their own sake, not for anybody else’s.’"

Wilhelm Sasnal’s exhibition at POLIN Museum - a modern, open institution of culture which does not shy away from posing difficult questions and from engaging its audience in personal interpretations and in a dialogue with history - will address the audiences interested in Polish-Jewish relations as well as all those who feel emotionally involved in the current affairs - in their social, political and poetic dimension. While inquiring into the meaning of the Polish landscape, the exhibition of Sasnal’s works at POLIN Museum poignantly addresses the formation of the nation’s identity, as mirrored in clichéd images of nature, projections of historical greatness and attendant resentments that bear on the totality of our experience of the present. The individual paintings remain ambiguous and open to interpretation, and yet brought together in one exhibition they convey a message to the Museum audience: our politics of memory will be personal rather than written by those in power, or else it will soon cease to exist altogether.

The exhibition is curated by Adam Szymczyk. In the years 2003-2014 he headed the Kunsthalle Basel, and in the years 2014-2017 he was Artistic Director of documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel.

The exhibition is open until 10 January 2022.
Fotografie przestrzeni wystawy
Fot. Maciek Jaźwiecki
The Greek female inmates mentioned above had previously been exposed to X-rays by Dr Dering during sterilisation experiments, to such an extent that the injuries in some even extended as far as the tailbone. In the footnotes to his book, Michał Wójcik provides a source for this information, but it is not true. Although Felicja Pleszowska, in her testimony of 24 October 1946, mentions these burns, she does not make such an accusation against Dering and does not consider him a perpetrator. These irradiations were carried out by an SS doctor, Dr Horst Schumann, in barrack 30 on the grounds of the Birkenau women's camp. Dr Dering took no part in them.

In the book, Michal Wojcik states: "And yet the case of Dr Dering is special. A member of the underground, one could say its pillar - becomes the closest collaborator of the perpetrators in the camp".

In doing so, he tries to discredit Calvary Capt. Witold Pilecki, who, after fleeing the camp in April 1943, wrote a positive opinion on Dr Dering (the "W" Report), acknowledging him as his close associate and a pillar of the military conspiracy in KL Auschwitz.

The accusations levelled against Dr Dering intensify in the book under review when its author writes about the fact that the doctor participated in the mass castration of Jews and Jewish women. "I cut 20 eggs out of young Jews today. Plenty of eggs for scrambled eggs" were Dering's words spoken in the presence
of another patient. As one can see, he had a weakness for poultry jokes. Hundreds and thousands of victims lay in the hospital after castration - Michał Wójcik states.

Did Dr Dering actually have a proclivity "for poultry jokes"? - Probably not; former prisoner Dawid Szarbel (no. 83397) contradicts it. He states in his account that these were SS doctors' words, uttered during the castration surgeries: "The ceiling consisted of mirrored sheets, such that I could observe the entire surgical procedure. Besides the nurses (Krankenpfleger), who handed out the instruments as instructed by Dering, many German officers were present, who watched the operations with curiosity and made ironic remarks that today there would be plenty of eggs for scrambled eggs. The excised testicles were placed into glass jars (...)."

Michał Wojcik cites statements of Jewish witnesses subjected to criminal castration procedures by this physician "torturer." They include David Szarbel and Hanoch Hipka mentioned above.

On seeing a photograph of Dr Dering, Dawid Szarbel recognised him as the doctor who allegedly performed a castration procedure on him in early 1943, removing his left testicle.

However, this is contradicted by an entry in the camp surgical book preserved from that period, with information regarding this procedure, performed on 28 May 1943, indicating irrefutably that the first operating physician was Dr Jan Grabczyński (no. 83864), assisted by nurse Zygmunt Skibiński (no. 6763), whereas Dr Dering was not present during the surgery. The procedure was recorded as amputatio testis sinistri (amputation of the left testicle), while the diagnosis column contained the entry: casus explorativus (experimental case).

On the other hand, Elias (Hanoch) Hipka testified that during the first procedure, he was operated on by a high-ranking SS officer, assisted by Dr Dering, who allegedly said, "Please let me also cut a pig". According to his testimony, this prisoner-doctor removed one of Hipka's testicle and, after a few months, the other.

The camp's surgical book affirms that Elias Hipka was operated on by SS-Obersturmführer Friedrich Entress on 24 June 1943, assisted by Dr Władysław Dering as the second operating physician. It should, however, be noted that his crude behaviour probably saved the patient's life. He successfully completed the procedure to remove the left testicle, which was improperly performed by an SS doctor with questionable surgical skills. The second surgery on 1 November 1943, during which Hipka's right testicle was removed, was performed by Dr Dering assisted by Dr Zbigniew Sobieszczański (no. 77022).

Michał Wójcik writes: "Was he aware of "Dziunek's" involvement in the mass sterilisation of men and women?" and, in justifying Pilecki, he immediately adds: "For the time being, let us assume he wasn't. The overwhelming majority of the operations took place in 1943 and 1944, but he must have learned something else".

It must be stated here that when these two surgeries above took place, Witold Pilecki was no longer an inmate of KL Auschwitz, as he had escaped from the camp on the night of April 26-27, 1943. Accordingly, he could not have known about the castration surgeries carried out in the camp hospital at a later date. "What else", then, could he have possibly known about?

Dering is accused of conspiratorial collaboration with another criminal among the prisoners. Allegedly, it was Alfred Stössel (no. 435), also an officer of the Polish Army, who, along with Dr Władysław Dering, was in the upper "top five" of the conspiracy organised by Pilecki. It is worth clarifying and rectifying here that this officer was a member of the camp's conspiracy called the Union of Military Organizations (ZOW) but never belonged to the top five, nor to any of the subsequent four, created in the camp by Cavalry Captain Pilecki, who does not corroborate this fact in the "W" Report of 1943, prepared for the Home Army Headquarters in Warsaw. The text was published as "Witold's Report" in the "Bulletin of the Auschwitz Preservation Society", No. 12, 1991.
The 1945 report has been misinterpreted by historians in that it purports to include Alfred Stössel in the top "five". In reality, the number 4 in this report should be Eugeniusz Obojski (camp number 194), not Alfred Stössel. Michał Wójcik did not notice this difference in both of Pilecki's reports from 1943 and 1945. Nevertheless, he accused Pilecki of covering up the case of the orderly Alfred Stössel, who killed sick prisoners with phenol in the camp infirmary. He discerned the cover-up of this crime in the 1945 report in the Captain's comments about him: "he had a certain disagreeable manner".

After quoting these words filled with agitation, Michał Wójcik subjects Witold Pilecki to devastating criticism: "It is a terrible sentence. It is short and enigmatic; although ripped out of context, it loses its dread. However, when one realises what it is all about, it strikes like a blow to the head. But, unfortunately, it's been said and hurts. It is unbearably painful. After all, Stössel's "disagreeable manner" is the killing of his fellow prisoners.

He further states: "Pilecki, therefore, admitted that he knew about it, knew the truth about serving the Nazis, and it did not bother him at all. He clearly belittled this practice. He implied that in the noble work of building up the resistance movement, needling the weak was a trifle".

However, it is difficult to agree with such an interpretation of Pilecki's words contained in the report of 1945: "The last 4 (Alfred Stössel) had a disagreeable manner, but one must do him justice, that he bravely endured the torture-tests in the bunkers and did not say a word, albeit knowing a great deal".

The founder of the military conspiracy in KL Auschwitz knew that opinions about Stössel among the prisoners varied. On the one hand, the officer had rendered outstanding service to the Union of Military Organizations in KL Auschwitz, but on the other hand, he was complicit in killing sick prisoners with phenol injections. His actions were incomprehensible to Pilecki, which is probably why he described them as a "disagreeable manner".

Ultimately, as a result of reports made by prisoners to the camp Gestapo, stating that Stössel had connections with Leon Kukielska
 Michał Wójcik refers to an account by a former prisoner, Stanisław Głowa (no. 20017), deposited at the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), that Alfred Stössel killed around 4,000 prisoners with phenol injections, which is certainly exaggerated many times over, while Dr Dering killed about 1,000 prisoners, which is entirely untrue. However, these figures are not confirmed by any other sources. The book's author did not acquaint himself with Dr Dering's memoirs, which are kept in the Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Dering writes: "In the afternoon Schumann returned to the infirmary with the Chief Physician Entress and they summoned me to the Arztzimmer - the doctor's room; Entress, as my immediate superior, informed me that by order of the Chief Commandant he was placing the operating room and all the staff at the disposal of Dr Schumann, who was to carry out "special" tasks here. Schumann then spoke up. "I wanted to take into account your childish prejudices and not force you to be obedient, which is absolutely required of you in the camp. You have seen that with my surgical technique, the entire task would have taken too long. I am a venereologist and have no intention of becoming a surgeon. The Chief Commandant has ordered you to perform these surgeries under my direction. It will be to the benefit of the camp, which needs the workforce of young Jews, and to the patients themselves, who will return to their work after a week's stay in the infirmary at the latest".

During these surgical procedures, victims of criminal experiments had their testicles removed, irradiated by X-rays and subjected to further medical examinations.

On the subject of prisoner doctors being forced by SS doctors to perform castration procedures, one can read in Dr Dering's memoirs: "I instantly assembled those interested in the surgical block, i.e., two fellow surgeons - Dr Jan Grabczyński from Cracow and Dr Zbigniew Sobieszczanka. I invited several senior doctor colleagues, including Prof. Jan Olbrycht from the Jagiellonian University, Maj. Dr Rudolf Diem from Warsaw, Dr Władysław Fejkel from Cracow, Dr Leon Wasilewski from Poznań, among Jewish doctors, Dr Samuel Steinberg from Paris and non-physicians, engineer Adam Kuryłowicz from Warsaw. I outlined the demands of the Germans and the possible consequences for everyone, both patients and doctors, in the event of opposition. I waited for everyone to speak up, as it was not just about me, but about the whole hospital team, as well as over eighty patients. No one dared to protest, as they considered it too risky. The arguments of my colleagues generally coincided. Professor Olbrycht, the most senior in age and rank, as a forensic doctor, and therefore one who deals with medicine and law took a stand that was unanimously accepted as the group's consensus opinion. According to the professor, we are in exceptional conditions at the camp, and contrary to all international, human and divine laws, eighty-eight people who are deprived of their sexual glands unilaterally by irradiation using X-rays are at risk of losing their lives if we refuse to take samples or entire destroyed glands via a surgical procedure. Waving aside any legal point of view, our duty under the existing camp conditions is to save human life at all costs. His opinion, accepted by the group, was: remove destroyed glands, which are practically inactive after exposure to "X-rays" and therefore of no importance to the body, and in certain - admittedly rare - cases, posing a threat of possible cancerous tumours, even undesirable. On the other hand, we are saving eighty-eight young lives with unilaterally preserved healthy sex glands, which will ensure a full sexual life. Furthermore, in doing so, we do not risk the danger of penalties, which may include death, for the hospital staff".

At this point, it is worth pointing out that these were threats that the camp Gestapo could carry out at any time. Failure to carry out the SS physicians' orders could have ended tragically, something the prisoner physicians were fully aware of when they decided to perform castration procedures, as several Polish physicians from the camp infirmary had been shot previously at the Death Wall. As an example, one can mention Dr Czesław Gawarecki (no. 14825), Dr Julian Koziol (no. 11379), or Dr Wilhelm Türschmid (no. 11461, as well as Dr Stefan Żabicki (no. 11016). The latter died in the courtyard of Block 11, uttering the words "Long
live Poland." The legitimacy of the decision taken at the time by Dr Władysław Dering and the other doctors is defended in the memoirs of a dentist, Prof. dr hab. Janusz Krzywicki, a former Auschwitz prisoner (no. 74593), who states: "We must realise that refusing to carry out an SS functionary's order involved facing the dangers of block 11 with all its consequences. These procedures, which cast a bad light on the surgeons, had to be carried out. Therefore, the surgeons saved the lives of many rascals by performing these procedures lege artis, which otherwise would have been performed by SS doctors, or perhaps even by SDG non-commissioned sanitary officers, without regard to whether the patients being operated on would even survive. The Nazi "scientists" must have these tissues for ascertaining and confirming the effectiveness of the sterilisation of men and women X-rayed using the Siemens X-ray bomb installed in the Birkenau women's camp infirmary. After all, there was a large all-female nursing staff composed of Slovakian Jewish women."

According to preserved camp surgery registers from hospital block 21, about 180 such operations were performed between 10 September 1942 and 15 January 1945. SS physicians performed 14 as lead surgeons, while prisoner physicians performed the remaining procedures, about 165 as lead surgeons. During this period, 164 cases are listed in the surgery registers as casus explorativus, of which ten women had the procedure described as ovariecotomia sinistra (removal of the left ovary).

Dr Dering performed one hundred and thirty castration procedures himself or as an assisting surgeon. From the registers mentioned above, it can also be established that Dr Dering conducted about eighty castration and sterilisation procedures as the lead surgeon, while Dr Jan Grabczyński (no. 83864) carried out about seventy such procedures as the lead surgeon and Dr Zbigniew Sobieszczański (no. 77022), performed the least, about fifteen. The moral evaluation of Dr Dering's actions and
of SS doctors - as with many other choices made by prisoners in the camp world - is highly complicated and multidimensional.

Władysław Bartoszewski (no. 4427), whose life was saved by Dr Dering and Dr Edward Nowak (no. 447) in KL Auschwitz, said the following about Dering: "Each day, he was confronted with horrible dilemmas. Whom to save? The one suffering or the one who stands a chance to survive? (...) To carry out the orders of an SS man, or refuse for moral reasons and condemn himself to death? It is something no human court can conclusively adjudicate."

Michał Wójcik undertook such a conclusive decision in writing that Dr Dering became "the closest collaborator of the perpetrators", and therefore by speculation, a murderer. Even in testimonies that negatively assessed Dr Dering, no one who spoke or wrote about him had so far dared to make such an accusation.

In one of the subsequent chapters of his book, entitled "Let the Future Pass Its Judgement", Michał Wójcik tries to convince the reader that the uprising and struggle for the liberation of the prisoners of KL Auschwitz, for which, in his opinion, Józef Cyrankiewicz, the leader of the left-wing resistance movement in the camp, even implored, was denied by the Home Army because, allegedly: "Political considerations stood in the way: the conviction that the resistance movement in the camp was controlled by left-wing factors, 'Jews and internationals'! They simply do not deserve help. Because their reason of state is not synonymous with the Polish national interest".

In reality, an armed attack on the German garrison of KL Auschwitz by the Home Army could only have taken place in the event of a general uprising in the occupied Polish territory or an attempt by the SS men deserting the camp to murder all the prisoners. Neither of these situations occurred, which is why an
earlier attack on the SS garrison was not attempted since such an action stood no chance of success given the overwhelming advantage of German forces.

Dr Henryk Świebocki wrote on this subject and proved it, among others, in the IV volume of an extensive monograph on the Oświęcim camp, entitled "Auschwitz 1940-1945. Crucial issues from the history of the camp" (Oświęcim 1995) but Michał Wójcik did not familiarise himself with this work because he does not refer to its findings either in the text of his book or in the footnotes included therein. He also did not refer to the other four volumes of this monograph when writing about the Sonderkommando rebellion at KL Auschwitz-Birkenau on 7 October 1944, nor did he make use of Danuta Czech's findings on this subject in her published "Calendar of Events in KL Auschwitz" (Oświęcim 1992).

The history of the tragic rebellion of the Sondek Kommando Jews, to which Michał Wójcik devoted a great deal of space in nearly ten further chapters of his book, is presented objectively by the author in the light of numerous memoirs and accounts of former KL Auschwitz prisoners, both Jews and Poles, especially members of the Sonderkommando. The reader cannot be indifferent to the content of these chapters and the magnitude of the crimes described in them, including the tragic situation of the Sonderkommando prisoners forced to incinerate the corpses of victims murdered in the gas chambers of KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau, which is downright horrifying.

Michał Wójcik is primarily concerned with the sensational description of the events presented, without paying much attention to the reliability of the narrative in terms of detail. Several factual errors can be noted here. For example, the director of the Auschwitz Museum in the 1960s was a long-time Auschwitz prisoner, Kazimierz Smoleń, and never Janusz Gumkowski, the director of the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland. Prisoner Olszyński (no. 39230), who was shot at the Death Wall on 28 October 1942, was not called Bruno, but Bolesław. Mieczysław Morawa, who participated in the test run of the crematorium ovens in Birkenau in March 1943, was not nineteen years old at the time, but twenty-three (he was born on 19.03.1920). The execution of the four Jewish female prisoners hanged on 6 January 1945 did not take place between blocks 1 and 2 in KL Auschwitz I but on the site of a complex of 20 buildings erected on the grounds adjacent to the main camp as part of its expansion plan, which envisaged the construction of over 50 new buildings.

Once again, it is essential to point out what Michał Wójcik fails to explain so precisely: the Jews of the Sonderkommando were convinced that as direct witnesses to the genocide, they would soon be murdered by the SS, and so made an attempt to revolt and flee the camp. Unfortunately, several hundred of them died. The tragic story of the revolt clearly shows what the consequences of a general uprising in the camp would have been without armed support from outside. The prisoners could not count on such support due to the weakness of the Silesian Area of the Home Army and not because of any ideological prejudice, anti-Semitism or passivity. Furthermore, one has to admit that the commander of the Silesian Area, Zygmunt Janke alias "Walter", whom Michał Wójcik cites (mistakenly referring to him as the commander of the Silesian District of the Home Army), is right that: "the prisoners actually had a greater chance of survival without carrying out such an attack".

Michał Wójcik's book should be classified as non-fiction. Although it presents authentic figures and events, its description is sometimes based on randomly collected historical material, very freely interpreted, particularly the section of the publication on the history of KL Auschwitz.

The author partially adopted the narrative technique and fictionalisation of events from scientific texts, and links the story with footnotes, which are often selectively chosen, and do not allow the reader to thoroughly check the veracity of the presented facts that Michał Wójcik additionally interprets rather subjectively - as is particularly visible in relation to the figure of Cavalry Capt. Witold Pilecki and one of his closest associates, Dr Władysław Dering.