JAKUB CHLEBOWSKI, RECTOR MAGNIFICUS EXULTUS – A DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF INTERNAL MEDICINE IN POSTWAR NORTH-EAST POLAND

Andrzej Wincewicz¹, Piotr Woltanowski², Stanislaw Sulkowski³, Jolanta Malyszko⁴

¹ Specialist Medical Practice-Pathologist, Non Public Health Care Unit - Department of Pathology (NZOZ Zakład Patologii Spółka z o.o.), Kielce, Poland
² Department of Public Finances and Financial Law, Faculty of Law, University of Białystok
³ Department of General Pathomorphology, Medical University of Białystok, Białystok, Poland
⁴ Department of Nephrology, Dialysis and Internal Medicine, Warsaw Medical University, Warsaw, Poland

**Corresponding author:** Associate Professor Andrzej Wincewicz MD, PhD, FEBP (Fellow of European Board of Pathology), Specialist Medical Practice-Pathologist, Non Public Health Care Unit - Department of Pathology (NZOZ Zakład Patologii Spółka z o.o.), Jagiellońska St. 70, 25-734 Kielce, Poland, Tel.: +48 41 368 47 87, Fax: +48 41 366 17 81, e-mail: ruahpolin@yahoo.com, andwinc@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

Jakub Chlebowski (Jakub Frydman) (1905-1969) was a distinguished professor of internal medicine and skillful organizer of health care system in Białystok region in the North east Poland. He graduated medicine in 1929 and worked at local university in prewar Vilnius. During World War Two, arrested by the Soviets and exiled to Siberian work camps he managed to return to Poland with Kosciuszko Division of Polish Army. Then, he continued to serve as a military and university medical doctor in Cracow and Lodz, finally to take over position of director of Internal Diseases Department in 1951 in Białystok, holding an office of rector magnificus of Medical University of Białystok from 1959 to 1962. Chlebowski trained generations of internal medicine specialists, who later became eminent representatives of emerging branches of internal medicine as distinct subspecialties in the field of cardiology, endocrinology and gastroenterology in Białystok. In course of anti-Semitic campaign during March Events in 1968, he was disposed from the post of director of the university hospital department. Constantly harassed, he immigrated with the family to Israel to die in public traffic accident in 1969. Jakub Frydman, who survived not only hunger of food, but also metaphorical “hunger of humanity” during World War Two, turned out to be as good and useful as daily bread for Polish community after wartime. He was so devoted in this action, that he even changed his surname into Chlebowski (Polish: Chleb=English: Bread). In this way, due to similar experience and experience-shaped mentality, Chlebowski could be counted among medical authorities of the time, the individuals with such a high moral standard as Janusz Korczak (1878 or 1879-1942) or Julian Kramsztyk (1851-1926).

**Keywords:** internal diseases, medical training, Vilnius, Białystok, March 1968.

“In fact, everyone can potentially learn medicine, but the distance is still huge from a man, who has medical knowledge, to a good medical doctor. What is needed is a vocation, a passion for the profession, a depth of faith in the usefulness and even the necessity of the work and a proper attitude towards the Sick.” (from the farewell speech of His Magnificence Rector, Professor Chlebowski to graduates of medicine in Białystok in 1960).
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Professor Dr. Jakub Chlebowski was born on May 3, 1905 in family of the Frydmans, Polish Jews in Liwenhof, (Russian Empire at the time, now Latvia) and died on January 25, 1969 in Israel [1, 2, 3]. He attended a comprehensive school and studied medicine at the King Stephen Báthory University (USB), obtaining a doctoral diploma of medical sciences (doctor medicinae universae) on March 16, 1929 in Vilnius [2].

From 1929 to 1933 he worked as an assistant at the 1st Department of Internal Diseases at USB under the supervision of professor Zenon Orlowski (1871–1948) [2]. Then he supervised the Internal Diseases Department at the Medical Center of the Lithuanian Association of Sanitary Aid in Vilnius (Polish: Lecznica Litewskiego Stowarzyszenia Pomocy Sanitarnej w Wilnie). During World War Two he was arrested by the Soviets and from 1941 exiled to Siberian work camps in the Komi Republic and Krasnoyarsk. Chlebowski was appointed a chief medical doctor of the Central Hospital in Komi and a chairman of the Union of Polish Patriots in Krasnoyarsk [2, 4]. He joined Tadeusz Kościuszko Division of the 1st Army of Polish Military forces in allied offensive with Soviet Red Army against Nazi Germans. In Spring 1945, he returned to Poland and he changed his surname from Frydman to Chlebowski [4].

Until the demobilization (December 1947), he was in charge of Departments of Internal Diseases in military hospitals in Krakow and Łódź [2]. From 1947 to 1951 Chlebowski worked in the Second Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Łódź, where his Vilnius tutor Zenon Orlowski was employed in a position of professor of balneology, climatology and physiotherapy. Chlebowski obtained associate professorship in 1948 on the basis of the dissertation “Cachexia and malnutrition” [Charłactwo i niedożywienie] [2] that provided a meticulous clinical insight in hunger disease, as it included medical observations from e.g. over ninety autopsies, too. Moreover, in a way, the topic of dissertation on associate professorship shows a completely holistic dedication to medicine of the whole person. The change of his surname from Frydman to Chlebowski also emphasizes soundly how much he was devoted to medical aspects of malnutrition. Namely, the surname Chlebowski contains in its form a word Bread (in Polish: Chleb) (Polish) Chleb-owski: (English) Bread-owski). In 1951 he got involved in organizing of a medical faculty of the Medical University of Białystok. Namely, on September 1, 1951, he was appointed the head of the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Medical Sciences in Białystok for next 17 years to follow [2]. In 1954 he obtained the title of professor. In 1953, in the year of Stalin’s death and very severe regime, Chlebowski defended one of his university students, who, denounced to be member of anti-Nazi and anti-Soviet resistance: the Home Army (Polish: Armia Krajowa; abbreviated AK), was expelled from medical studies [1, 2, 3]. Between 1957 and 1959 Chlebowski was appointed Vice-Rector of the Medical Academy in Białystok, and between 1959 and 1962 he held an office of rector magnificus (Magnificent Rector). In Białystok Professor Chlebowski comprehensively and broadly introduced the principles of Vilnius clinical school, which have been cherished by following medical generations [2, 5].

His most talented trainees were next dedicated to certain, emerging branches of internal medicine as distinct subspecialties in the field of cardiology, endocrinology and gastroenterology etc., delving into cores of these sections of internal medicine on experimental and clinical grounds to rise them to the level of truly academic science in Białystok [2, 6]. For example, Andrzej Kaliciński (1922–2002) (head of Cardiology Department and subsequent rector) focused on cardiology, Ida Kinalska (1933-) and Alina Wasilewska (1928–2014) took care of modern diabetes, Antoni Gabryelewicz (1928-2010) and Władysław Szalaj (1930–2009) developed gastroenterology in Bialystok, Jadwiga Rostafińska (1926–2009) developed gastroenterology in Bialystok, Antoni Gabryelewicz (1928-2010) and Władysław Szalaj (1930–2009) developed gastroenterology in Białystok, Jadwiga Rostafińska (1926–2007) made allergology the priority of her professional life, the others got fond of hematology, and so on [3] Due to his merits Chlebowski received a doctor honoris causa from the University of Montpellier in France [1, 2, 3]. He also was awarded numerous orders of the highest rank of People’s Republic of Poland, e.g. Order of Polonia Restituta (Rebirth of Poland) with a comment that the professor became “an institution whose principles are now cultivated by large numbers of his colleagues and students” [2, 3]. His proficiency in clinical medicine was legendary and his example was truly overwhelming. The statement, repeated by his loyal cooperators: “Examine the patient in a way, Chlebowski would have done” became proverbial. He had an opportunity to observe and provide health care for previously hospitalized patients in Paris during his fellowship, when he visited Paris and Vienna in...
1933 [7, 8]. He was highly active and efficient in the whole region. As frequently as at least twice a month he visited provincial hospitals for consultations and healthcare organizational issues in the north-east part of Poland [1, 4, 6]. Some of his followers became professors of medicine including e.g. Tadeusz Bogdanik (1921–2011), Antoni Gabryelewicz, Ida Kinalska, Andrzej Kaliciński and Jan Stasiewicz [3].

Figure 1. Professor Chlebowski during medical examination of pediatric patient. The courtesy of Dr Irena Chlebowska-Bennett, Family Collection of Professor Jakub Chlebowski’s Daughter.

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Jakub Chlebowski was fond of cinema, theatre and music [1]. He greatly cared for purity of Polish language in his cooperators’ and students’ practice, as he used to correct any linguistic shortcomings, he recorded [1]. As a very sociable person, on his birthday May 3, each year, he invited all cooperators of his department and used to say candidly that this was a triple occasion and anniversary of the Constitution of May 3, 1791, his birth and his comeback to postwar Poland [1]. At the time it was a testimony of great courage because the feast of Constitution of May 3, 1791 was celebrated in prewar Poland and was banned by communists. Thus, such independent opinions of high authority as the medical university rector, but first of all a freeman Chlebowski, annoyed the communists. In a report of secret police dated on February 1968, Chlebowski was additionally accused of improper influence on medical students of the fifth year of medical education due to criticism of socio-economical conditions in Communist Poland, support of Israel in a conflict with Arabs, and later for financial aid for Zionist or-
null
hospital practice [56]. He reported on primary erythroblastosis and a case of Waldenström’s macroglobulinemia as well [57, 58]. Chlebows-ki presented changes in the leukocyte count in icterus in 1955 from his own clinical database [59]. He published numerous case reports. For example, together with dr Rostafińska and subsequent rector Ludwik Komiczynski (1909-70), he reported a case of aortic arch syndrome (Takayasu disease) in 1959 [60]. Chlebowski highlighted the features of Tietze’s syndrome in one of his reports, too [61]. His clinical team reported on treatment of Sjögren’s syndrome with arechin (Resochin) [62].

**HANDBOOKS OF HIS AUTHORSHIP**

Chlebowski was the author of several highly prized textbooks at the time of their edition in opinions of regional readership. He belonged to Editorial Board of Medical Review together with Prof. dr Jakub Węgierko (1889–1960), other eminent professor of internal medicine and co-founder of the diabetic section of Polish Society of Internal Medicine Doctors in Poland, curiously enough whose brother Aleksander Węgierko (1893–1941) was the first director and founder of Dramatic Theatre in Białystok in years 1940–1941. Jakub Chlebowski focused on writing of textbooks on cardiology as he found circulation disturbances main problems of management of patients in departments of internal diseases. Chlebowski published a handbook on diseases of heart and blood vessels in two editions in 1953 and 1954 [65].

As his Vilnius supervisor Zenon Orłowski was a recognized professor of balneology, so Jakub Frydman Chlebowski followed in footsteps of his chief in studies on impact of mineral water from Busko spa for the function of stomach [63]. Later he also was still focused on spa therapy issues as he examined the influence of the dry remnants of aqueous fraction of the mineral water on the gastric acid [64].
chapter on the disorders of pulmonary circulation for celebrated Polish textbook edited by Professor Edward Szczeklik (1898–1985) and printed in 1965 in Warsaw [66]. Chlebowski was an author of a university handbook titled: “Internal diseases” that covered alimentary tract, circulatory system and respiratory system diseases in 1960 [67]. As a teacher Chlebowski selected and graded medical knowledge with great practical application. Thanks to that, he also summarized content of internal disease for intermediate level of medical education for secondary medical schools in a separate book publication [68]. His dietetic manuals were titled: “Basic information in dietetics” and “The nourishment in health and disease” [69, 70].

**ANTI-SEMITIC CAMPAIGN IN COURSE OF SO-CALLED MARCH EVENTS OF 1968**

Emigration case of Jakub Chlebowski was exceptional even in statistics in a regional aspect, as he was one of the only two medical doctors from Białystok region (the second one from the list was his wife Tamar Chlebowski, a dentist, his severely ill wife at the time) among total of 371 Polish medical doctors of Jewish origin, who lodged an application for issuing emigration documents to Israel due to March events of 1968 (Emigration of Polish citizens of Jewish origin in a period between January 1, 1968 to August 31, 1969) [71]. The other persecuted, fired from academic work, person was Professor of Dermatology Janusz Lesiński (1920–1995), who actually did not emigrate. Such statistics means that in Białystok repressions of March 1968 were limited to few but esteemed individuals and for sure were grounded somehow by unfair competition and slight expectations that elimination of two distinguished professors of medicine is going to provide some more space for career of participants of meetings of University Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party [4]. However, on contrary to such possible expectations most of the significant academic positions were taken over by loyal and talented pupils of Jakub Chlebowski due to their professional qualifications in spite of the grimy atmosphere after expulsion of the two medical professors from the university. At his farewell professor Chlebowski was given flowers by his cooperators aware of the great loss of academic prestige and casual professional medical upgrading due to impact of such a medical authority as Jakub Chlebowski. One of his loyal successors is Professor Ida Kinalska (former head of Endocrinology Department of Medical University of Białystok), who gave a concise comment in the case in a more or less statement like this: “I do not know, if history will ever forgive this sad time of inhuman conduct in occupants’ manner, that luckily passed away, to the people of this epoch, who destroyed -with one signature or thoughtless word- someone who has [usefully] done so much for the country and created so much, just because they expected to gain recognition and privileges from the principals” [72].

In legal analysis of the case, leaving the borders of the Polish People’s Republic in order to travel to Israel was often associated with the loss of citizenship in practice. In accordance with the legal regulations at that time (Article 13 paragraph 1 of the Act of February 15, 1962 on Polish Citizenship, Diary of Laws No. 10, item 49, as amended), a Polish citizen lost his citizenship, if two conditions were cumulatively fulfilled: 1. obtaining a permit of the State Council, issued at the request of the Minister of Internal Affairs to change the Polish citizenship 2. acquisition of foreign citizenship (e.g. Israeli citizenship). Emigrants of 1968 filed applications for permission to change Polish citizenship to the internal affairs bodies of the presidium of district national councils, pursuant to article 16 passage 4 of the Citizenship Act of 1962. As a result of the application, the Minister of Interior Affairs submitted an application to the Council of State, which ruled on the permission to change Polish citizenship. The legal situation of those people was additionally complicated by the resolution of the Council of State of January 23, 1958, No. 5/58 on the permission to change Polish citizenship for persons leaving for permanent residence in the State of Israel. This resolution was never officially published and invalid at that time of its issue and could have been legally categorized only as the announcement of eventual granting permission for citizenship’s change [73, 74]. In the light of this resolution, the consent for the change of Polish citizenship to Israeli citizenship was automatically obtained by individuals according to point 1 of the resolution. In practice of unlawful assumption, the travel document by itself malfunctioned as substitutes for an individual consent of free will and loss of Polish citizenship due to defective resolution of the Council of State [73, 74].
From a bystander’s point of view the case of Jakub Chlebowski could be reflected in proverbial, biblical context of scapegoat who, being an innocent victim, was ritually burdened with the sins of others, then driven away at the Yom Kippur in historical biblical tradition. First classically described by philosopher Kenneth DuVernoy Burke (1897–1993) in his books titled: “Permanence and Change” (1935) and “A Grammar of Motives” (1945), who anthropologically recognized that scapegoat mechanism was based on the fact that the society selected a blamed object of collective aggression aimed at death of such an individual or at least various kinds of exclusion (e.g. expulsion) at the crisis, risk of disintegration or any loss of social balance [75, 76]. In this context it is proper to quote Leviticus 16:8, Jewish Publication Society (1917): “And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel”. In consequence of March 1968, besides his wife Tamar, Jakub Chlebowski was the only one exiled medical doctor from his regional society of Bialystok and the professor of the highest academic rank from the entire Poland due to the fact that he had held an office of rector magnificus of Medical University (at the time Academy) of Bialystok.

Moreover, due to his quite soon and sudden death in a road traffic accident in January 1969 after moving to Israel, it can be said in colloquial language that his persecutors quickly and effectively “sent him to heaven”. In a sorrow of being exiled, hatred could easily dominate attitude of the victims. That is why, the bible says, that Aaron casted also optionally lot on the another one sacrificial goat for Azazel (primarily meaning God’s strength and being favorite archangel of God) recognized as a demon or fallen angel in a mechanism of rejection. Being a medical student and subsequently a worker (author: AW) of Medical University of Bialystok, one could reflect, what severely damaging consequences of such repressions on Jakub Chlebowski were in memory of his relatives. In addition, for the summer 1968, the authorities refused to issue a passport for his daughter, who was granted a foreign holiday student fellowship for medical practice [4]. Loss of the beloved father could be a sufficient reason not to come back to Bialystok and to have quite bitter feelings toward any details related to his past in postwar Poland. Therefore, everybody would wonder, why not to share Azzazel-like feelings in such a situation of severe injury to the closest family. Surprisingly and to our moralizing relief, the reality in this individual case has been completely different. Namely, the daughter of Professor Jakub Chlebowski, Australian ophthalmologist Irene Bennett has been a founder of Jakub Chlebowski’s prize for the top medical graduate student of each year at the Medical University in Bialystok since 2005. Thus, the kindness of Professor Chlebowski’s daughter makes us additionally sure that the sacrifice of Professor’s life was for God not for evil, Azzazel.

However, all his life Jakub Chlebowski neither felt personally like scapegoat, nor he had even a slight idea that anyone could put him in a role of scapegoat. The strength of his character and will made him always feel absolutely free. And this was always very irritating for enslaved individuals, who fitted the Latin term “homo soviaticus” (homo soviaticus: a citizen of communist Poland: a term coined by a great philosopher Joseph Tischner (1931-2000), who- in that way- wanted to emphasize the profound destruction of human mentality and impairment of civilian habits by communism), thus they (hominis sovieti) finally made Jakub Chlebowski a victim of March Events of 1968. Such a great feeling of personal freedom and justice determined his un-

Figure 3. Jakub Chlebowski in his gown of Rector Magnificus Universitatis (at the time Academiae) Medicae Bialostocensis. The courtesy of Dr Irena Chlebowska-Bennett, Family Collection of Professor Jakub Chlebowski’s Daughter.
ease life during World War Two and later under Polish communist regime.

After decades, shortly after the collapse of communist regime in Poland, in 1990, the Medical University of Białystok condemned a decision of expulsion of its former rector Professor Jakub Chlebowski and a university hospital lecture hall was given his name with commemorating bronze plaque of the great patron, on initiative of his followers, who were independent, academic professors at the time [2]. The story of Professor Chlebowski warns not to get rid of the most esteemed medical professor from any academic centre, as it is bitterly shameful loss for ages no matter how despicable pretexts are, even if we do not belong personally to persecutors. The task for medical historians is to formulate such a universal warning on the basis of records of the past because such a harassment of the individual can occur everywhere and every time. The heritage of Jakub Chlebowski should be recognized in at least two main perspectives: his deep pathophysiology-oriented insight and great impact on education and training of specialists of internal diseases. Namely, the clinical approach of Jakub Chlebowski was remarkably grounded by his deep insight in pathophysiology of hemostasis particularly in polycythemia, as well as in renal, gastrointestinal and endocrine disorders which were also issues that addressed celebrated Macedonian Pathophysiologist Prof. Dr. Isak Tadzer (1916-2005) [77]. Professor Chlebowski (1905-1969) was truly a founder of internal medicine on academic level in the first decades of the Medical University of Białystok and in the whole region of North-East Poland, with striking similarities to the eminent professor Dimitar Arsov (1908-1974), who was also honored with a title of Doctor Honoris Causa of one of the French universities and taught generations of numerous medical doctors in Macedonia [78].

To sum up, Jakub Frydman, who survived not only hunger of food, but also metaphorical “hunger of humanity” during World War Two, turned out to be as good and useful as daily bread for Polish community after wartime. He was so devoted in this action that he even changed his surname into Chlebowski (Polish: Chleb = English: Bread). In this way, due to similar experience and experience-shaped mentality, Chlebowski could be counted among medical authorities of the time, the individuals with such a high moral standard as Janusz Korczak (1878 or 1879-1942) or Julian Kramsztyk (1851-1926). Indeed, scientific explorations of hunger disease belonged to a mainstream core of scientific activity of numerous medical doctors like students of Janusz Korczak during World War Two and postwar period, if only they managed to survive Holocaust [79].

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Резиме

ЯКУБ ХЛЕБОВСКИ, RECTOR MAGNIFICUS EXULTUS – ИСТАКНАТ ПРОФЕСОР ПО ИНТЕРНА МЕДИЦИНА ВО ПОСТОВЕНА СЕВЕРОИСТОЧНА ПОЛСКА

Анджеј Винчевич¹, Пјотр Волтановски², Станислав Сулковски³, Јоланта Малишко⁴

¹ Специјалистичка медицинска практика – патолог, Катедра за патологија, Кјелце, Полска
² Оддел за јавни финанси и финансиско право, Правен факултет, Универзитет во Бјалисток
³ Оддел за општа патоморфологија, Медицински универзитет во Бјалисток, Бјалисток, Полска
⁴ Оддел за нефрологија, дијализа и интерна медицина, Варшавски медицински универзитет, Варшава, Полска

Якуб Хлебовски (Якуб Фридман) (1905–1969) бил истакнат професор по интерна медицина и вешт организатор на здравствениот систем во регионот на Бјалисток во североисточна Полска. Дипломирал медицина во 1929 година и работел на локален универзитет во предвоениот Вилнус. За време на Втората светска војна е уапсен од страна на Советите и протеран во сибирските работнички кампови, од каде што успел да се врати во Полска со дивизијата Косчиушко на полската армија. Потоа продолжил да служи како воен и университетски лекар во Краков и во Лоѓ, за конечно да ја преземе функцијата директор на Одделот за интерни болести во Бјалисток во 1951 година, каде што од 1959 година до 1962 година бил на функцијата Rector Magnificus Exultus на Медицинскиот универзитет во Бјалисток. Хлебовски обучувал генерации специјалисти по интерна медицина, кои подоцна станале еминентни претставници на новите гранки на интерната медицина како посебни супспецијалисти во областа на кардиологијата, ендокринологијата и гастронтерологијата во Бјалисток. Постојано малтретиран, со семејството тој емигрирал во Израел, каде што загинал во сообраќајна несреќа во 1969 година. Якуб Фридман, кој преживеал не само глад за храна туку и метафоричен „глад за човештво“, за време на Втората светска војна се покажал како добар и корисен како леб за полската заедница по војната. Тој је бил толку посветен на оваа активност што дури и го променил своето презиме во Хлебовски [полски: Chleb = англиски: Bread (леб)]. На овој начин, поради лично искуство и менталитет обликуван од искуство, Хлебовски може да се смета за еден од медицинските авторитети од тоа време, заедно со лицата со висок морален стандард како Јануш Корчак (1878 или 1879–1942) или Јулијан Крамштик (1851–1926).

Ключни зборови: интерни болести, медицинска обука, Вилнус, Бјалисток, март 1968 година