

Stanisław Kłodziński: Auschwitz survivor, medical practitioner, social activist, and journalist (1918–1990)

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The Polish periodical *Przegląd Lekarski – Oświęcim*, which came out as an annual from 1961 to 1991, holds a special place among the books and publications dedicated to the history of concentration camps. Stanisław Kłodziński, an Auschwitz survivor, medical practitioner, and social activist, served as its chief editor.¹

Kłodziński was born on 4 May 1918 into a Cracovian family deeply attached to the Polish patriotic tradition. He attended the Bartłomiej Nowodworski Grammar School in Kraków, and Antoni Kępiński was one of his school friends. When

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1 Photo courtesy of Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu (the Archive of the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim; hereinafter APMA-B).

he finished school in 1936, he went up to the Jagiellonian University to read Medicine. His choice of a field of study must certainly have been inspired by his maternal grandfather Franciszek Murdziński, who was a physician and head of the children's hospital on ulica Strzelecka in the city of Kraków; while the academic community of the Jagiellonian University offered a good milieu for the intellectual development of its students.

WORKING FOR PATRONAT

In September 1939, when Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany

and the Soviet Union and the Second World War began, the Polish Red Cross sent Stanisław Kłodziński to work in the military hospital set up in Father Kuznowicz's student hall. In October 1939 this hospital was closed down, but Kłodziński continued to work for the Polish Red Cross and was detailed to Sekcja Pomocy Jeńcom Wojennym, Wysiedlonym i Więźniom Politycznym, its welfare section for the provision of aid to prisoners-of-war, displaced persons, and political prisoners. Most of the refugees were Poles whom the Germans were evicting and resettling from the Poznań region and other parts of Poland incorporated in Germany. The section's work focused on running outpatient treatment centres, collecting and dispensing medications, food, and clothing. Initially, it was conducted in the city of Kraków, but later also in Polish Red Cross units in areas in its Kraków division before the war but now incorporated in Germany. The German occupying authorities permitted the section to visit Polish political prisoners the Germans held in the Montelupich



Photo 1. | Stanisław Kłodziński: Auschwitz survivor, medical practitioner, social activist, and journalist (1918–1990)

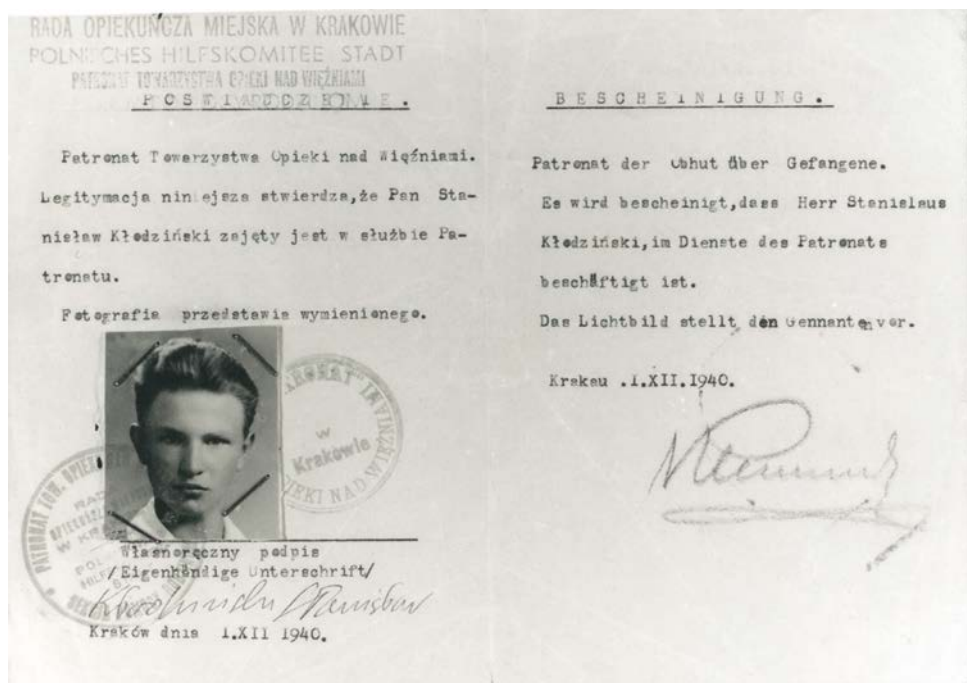


Photo 2. | Stanisław Kłodziński's bilingual (Polish and German) ID card issued by the Kraków municipal branch of the Central Welfare Council confirming his employment with Patronat. Courtesy of APMA-B

prison. During their official visits for the dispatch of food, medications, and clothing, the section's staff made an unofficial record of inmates in the jail, which they hid in a matchbox, and acted as go-betweens for contacts between prisoners and their families.

The extent of the aid dispensed in the Generalgouvernement was growing at a rapid rate, and in January 1941 the welfare section for prisoners and their families (Sekcja Opieki nad Więźniami i ich Rodzinami), known for short as Patronat, joined the RGO (Rada Główna Opiekuńcza, the Central Welfare Council, the only Polish welfare organisation the Germans recognised and tolerated). The staff of Patronat, including Kłodziński, received bilingual Polish and German work permits issued by the Kraków municipal branch of the Central Welfare Council. Henceforth they were employees of Patronat Towarzystwa Opieki nad Więźniami (German *Patronat der Obhut über Gefangene*—the Patronage Association for Aid to Prisoners).²

2 Kłodziński, 1985: 161–162.

There was no change to the duties the staff of Patronat were expected to carry out—they continued to supply prisoners with food, clothing, and medications. What did change was the area their activities covered: now they visited other prisons and labour camps the Germans had established in the environs of Kraków. Patronat's staff were a well-organised team offering mutual support to one another. Zygmunt Klemensiewicz was their group leader, and one of its members was Teresa Lasocka, a lady who would turn out to be a very important person in Stanisław Kłodziński's circle of friends in the next years.

In June 1940, the Germans opened a new concentration camp on the outskirts of the city of Oświęcim, henceforth dubbed “Auschwitz” by the Germans, who used the same name for the concentration camp. The first Polish political prisoners arrived from Tarnów prison, and the next batch was sent in from Nowy Wiśnicz. Patronat created a new unit called Grupa Oświęcim (the Auschwitz Group), and Kłodziński was assigned to work in it.

In the autumn of 1940, he was sent to Auschwitz to collect information on the prisoners' situation. He had a lot of experience of relations with prison staff, as he had visited the Montelupich jail in Kraków as well as prisons in Nowy Wiśnicz, Tarnów, and Rzeszów. Equipped with the indispensable documents: a permit to cross the border, which he needed to travel from Kraków and the Generalgouvernement to Auschwitz, because the camp was in an area incorporated in Germany, his International Red Cross ID, and a letter of reference explaining that he wanted to dispense aid to prisoners, he arrived in the city and went to see Father Jan Skarbek, the parish priest of the Roman Catholic Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Father Skarbek was in touch with the Central Welfare Council, supplying its representatives with news on the concentration camp.

Kłodziński got into the camp through an unguarded area and spoke to the commandant, SS *Lagerführer* Karl Fritzsche. He wrote the following report on the meeting:

I had my letter of recommendation in my hand as I was led into the barrack accommodating the *Blockführer's* office, which was located next to the main entrance to the camp. . . . Inside, I was brought before SS *Lagerführer* Karl Fritzsche, who of course asked who I was and what I wanted. I introduced myself and presented the letter I had from the Kraków branch of the Polish Red Cross. The letter said we wanted to supply prisoners held in Auschwitz with aid in the form of parcels. Fritzsche read the letter and asked how we in-

tended to organise this parcel dispatch. I said that first we wanted to send in a supply of personal hygiene items for prisoners, followed by food parcels. . . . Fritzscht did not seem to be delighted to see me in the camp because at the end of the meeting he said that if I continued to visit Auschwitz, I would end up in it for good. At any rate, the atmosphere of the meeting was normal and Fritzscht was fairly courteous though he checked my credentials very carefully. . . . I left with his assurance that it would be possible for us to organise aid for prisoners and that we would receive an answer in writing on the matter.³

In November Kłodziński's group started getting parcels ready in Kraków's philharmonic hall and continued in December 1940 and January 1941. They contained basic food products such as hard tack and a piece of bacon, with a traditional Polish Christmas wafer at Christmastide, and were sent to the camp's address. Another parcel permit was issued to the priests of the local parishes, who had seen Fritzscht in December 1940 and presented a letter from Archbishop Sapieha asking for permission for the Church to supply aid. Local people from Oświęcim and its environs handled the delivery of the parcels.

IN AUSCHWITZ

Stanisław Kłodziński was arrested in Kraków on 18 June 1941. The day before he went to Nowy Targ to collect an official consignment of flour and eggs for prisoners. He was accompanied on the journey by Stanisław Głowa, a Patronat employee. On the road to Kraków, police stopped their car and took their ID documents away but allowed them to take the food to Kraków. Next day, both of them reported at the German police station for the return of their IDs, but instead they were detained and handed over to the Gestapo. After an initial round of interrogation, it seemed that Kłodziński would be released, however, the Gestapo found a kite on him from a prisoner held in the Montelupich jail and addressed to Kłodziński. The Gestapo accused him of maintaining illegal contacts with political prisoners and put his name on the list for transportation to Auschwitz.

3 APMA-B, Zespół oświadczenia (Statements Collection), statement by Stanisław Kłodziński, Vol. 104, pp. 5–6.

He arrived on 12 August 1941 along with 38 other men. He was registered as No. 20019.⁴ Stanisław Głowa was on the same transport and was registered as No. 20017. Kłodziński's family tried to procure his release. The board of the Polish Red Cross issued a letter of recommendation describing his commitment to his work, but this did not bring about the required effect.

On leaving quarantine, he was sent to the construction commando like most of the other new arrivals and set to work transporting building materials for new prisoners' blocks. He kept in touch with his family in letters sent from the camp, in which he asked them to send him warm clothing, food, and also a pair of glasses as the ones he had had been smashed during his arrest.⁵ In October 1941, he developed pneumonia in the right lung and was admitted to Block 28, the prisoners' hospital.

After a partial recovery, he was again sent to work in a construction commando, first as a bricklayer's assistant in the Neubau commando and later as an assistant plumber for the installation of a water supply network. He also worked as a night watchman in Hospital Block 19.

In the autumn of 1942, his health deteriorated again due to starvation diarrhoea, and again he was admitted to the prisoners' hospital. After recuperating,

Ausstellung, Auschwitz 3/5

Konzentrationslager Auschwitz
Abteilung II.

Eingänge am 12. August 1941:

Art	Matr. Nr.	Name	Vorname	Geb. Dat.	Geb. Ort	Beruf
Lieferung von der Staatspolizei-Stelle Katowice.						
Polen						
	20005	Bolek	Methoda	5. 5.23	Orłowa	Grubenarbeiter
	20006	Jankowski	Stanisław	5.12.08	Schlesien	Orłowa, Arbeiter
	20007	Stokas	Karl	4.11.06	Dobry	Lakfmaler
	20008	Stokas	Edward	10.11.21	Krakau	Bergmann
	20009	Stokas	Witold	22. 9.21	Łódź	Arbeiter
Lieferung von Kommando der Sicherheitspolizei						
und des SS für den Distrikt K F A A A						
	20010	Augustynowicz	Alexander	13. 8.22	Krakau	Schlosserlehrl.
	20011	Borowski	Wladimir	10.10.22	Krakau	Magazinleiter
	20012	Bolek	Otto	20.10.17	Tschern	Büroangestellter
	20013	Stokas	Stanisław	10.11.12	Tschern	Technische, Dipl. Kaufmann
	20014	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 7.20	Krakau	Gym. Schüler
	20015	Stokas	Stanisław	4. 9.05	Cichawa	Schuster
	20016	Stokas	Ernst	25. 8.77	Wien	Fabrikant
	20017	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 9.20	Lipsia	Chemiearbeiter
	20018	Stokas	Stanisław	10.12.14	Krakau	Schuster
	20019	Stokas	Stanisław	4. 5.18	Krakau	Student Med.
	20020	Stokas	Josef	3. 7.25	Stargard	Landwirt
	20021	Stokas	Josef	18. 6.06	Łódź	Garn
	20022	Stokas	Stanisław	4.12.14	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20023	Stokas	Stanisław	6. 4.13	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20024	Stokas	Stanisław	10.11.11	Tschern	Stellmacher
	20025	Stokas	Stanisław	14. 7.10	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20026	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20027	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20028	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20029	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20030	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20031	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20032	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20033	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20034	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20035	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20036	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20037	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20038	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20039	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20040	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20041	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20042	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20043	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20044	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20045	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20046	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.
	20047	Stokas	Stanisław	10. 1.20	Krakau	Telegr. Techn.

Photo 3. | List of prisoners who arrived in Auschwitz on 12 August 1941. Stanisław Kłodziński is No. 20019 on the list. Courtesy of APMA-B

4 *Księga pamięci...*, Vol. 1, 628–644.

5 APMA-B, Zespół oświadczenia (Statements Collection), statement by Stanisław Kłodziński, Vol. 119, pp. 1–2.

he was lucky enough to be put on the hospital's staff list, working as an assistant orderly in Block 20. He wrote the following account of the conditions in that block:

I was sent to work in one of the blocks making up the *Häftlingsrevier* (prisoners hospital), actually it was Block 20. I worked in room No. 3 of the *Isolierstation* (isolation section), the last room on the left side of the corridor. This block was out of bounds, as it was intended for prisoners with infectious diseases. The SS were panic-stricken at the thought that they might catch one of these diseases, so they tried to avoid going to and staying in Block 20, which was good for us. There was always a prisoner on *Pförtner* (porter) duty at the entrance to the block. His job was to guard the entrance and stop unauthorised persons from coming in. Of course, the *Pförtner* could not stop an SS man who wanted to come in, but on such occasions there would be a loud *Achtung* (German for "Attention!"), and for me that was an alert.⁶

Later, Kłodziński worked on his own as an orderly, keeping records of prisoners' hospital stay.

There was an underground resistance movement operating in Auschwitz, which sent news out of the camp on the situation and the atrocities committed by the SS.⁷ There were many prisoners engaged in these activities, and so was a large group of people outside, handling the transfer of kites (secret messages) and other packages and getting them to their destinations. Stanisław Kłodziński joined in these operations. He established contact with the resistance movement in Kraków and sent encoded messages to Teresa Lasocka, his acquaintance in Patronat. He used the alias "Stakło," while Lasocka's pseudonym was "Tell." The messages were written or edited by Józef Cyrankiewicz, another prisoner in the camp resistance movement. The words of the church hymn *Kto się w opiekę* (Psalm 91) served as the basis of their cipher, and in the secret messages they asked for things prisoners needed:

. . . In the kites he asked for things like food, medicines and medical dressings, and had parcels containing such items brought into the camp and shared out in a fair way. It was a drop in the ocean of the needs of emaciated and sick prisoners, nonetheless it

6 APMA-B, Zespół oświadczenia (Statements Collection), statement by Stanisław Kłodziński, Vol. 119, p. 4.

7 More on the resistance movement inside Auschwitz in Świebicki.

was an extremely important operation reassuring them psychologically, proof of the solidarity and aid they could count on from outside.⁸

Kłodziński joined an operation to send illegal copies of documents out of the camp. One of these records was a list of Jewish women prisoners registered in Birkenau and murdered in the gas chamber. Prisoners compiled a list of 32 Polish women and girls from Bydgoszcz registered and subsequently killed in the gas chamber. Another of these documents, entitled “Katy Oświęcimia” (The Butchers of Auschwitz), listed the names of members of the camp’s staff who committed atrocities against prisoners. A collection of photographs clandestinely taken by *Sonderkommando* prisoners in the summer of 1944 was an invaluable item documenting the atrocities perpetrated at that time. Kłodziński wrote in the secret message serving as the covering letter to this collection:

I am sending you photos of the Birkenau gassing operation. They show one of the piles of corpses burned in the open air because the crematoria could not cope with the volume of bodies that had to be disposed of. In front of the pile there are bodies waiting to be thrown into the fire. Another photo shows one of the sites in the wood where people undress, ostensibly to take a bath but in fact they are taken to the gas chamber.⁹

A register known as the Bunker Book was kept for Block 11 (Death Block), recording data concerning prisoners incarcerated in the Bunker cells, with information on what happened to them. The Bunker Book was sent out of the camp in early 1944. The camp mortuary also kept a register recording the prison numbers of those who died or were killed, including many murdered with a phenol injection. One of the prisoners managed to make a copy of this register and hand it over to Kłodziński, who sent it out of the camp. Another document clandestinely copied and sent out of the camp contained a list of prisoners in receipt of parcels and their address in the camp (i.e., the number of the block in which they lived).

There were more people than just local inhabitants in the network of helpers providing aid for prisoners. One of them was Maria Stromberger, an Austrian

8 Opoczyński.

9 APMA-B, Materiały ruchu oporu (records of the resistance movement), passage from a kite sent to the commanding unit of the Brzeszcze branch of the underground PPS (Polish Socialist Party), Vol. II, p. 136.

nurse in the German Red Cross and on the staff of the camp who volunteered to deliver kites. Nurse Stromberger was the *Oberschwester*, the matron of the nurses employed in the SS hospital. She didn't speak Polish and used a set of secret passwords to communicate with others in the network and deliver secret messages for prisoners.¹⁰

Stanisław Kłodziński stayed in touch with members of the resistance movement, especially Teresa Lasocka, practically to the end of his time in Auschwitz. His last kite is dated 12 December 1944.

EVACUATION TO MAUTHAUSEN

In the autumn of 1944, when the eastern front was getting closer and closer to Auschwitz, the Germans started to evacuate inmates to other concentration camps in Germany. In mid-January 1945, they set about clearing the camp completely and evacuated walking prisoners on foot.¹¹ Stanisław Kłodziński was put into a column of prisoners who were marched first to Wodzisław Śląski (then known by a German name, Loslau), a distance of 63 km (39 miles) away from the camp. There they were loaded up on a freight train and taken to Mauthausen, a concentration camp in Lower Austria, where he was held until 5 May 1945, when American troops entered the camp. On being liberated, Kłodziński joined in the work of the Polish committee looking after sick survivors. He returned to Poland in July 1945, when the committee's work was over.

10 Maria Stromberger delivered the secret reports drafted by prisoners to a shop where she rendezvoused with liaison girls. One of the girls, Helena Datoń, aged 17 at the time, wrote the following recollection of her meetings with Sister Stromberger: "She used to come to *Haus 7* in a nurse's white uniform to do her shopping. Her serenity and self-control inspired people's confidence, and this was probably what made them like and respect her. The illegal messages she handed over to me were always packed in matchboxes or hidden in a pile of ration cards and never looked suspicious. I always admired her."

11 Strzelecki, 140–188.

PHYSICIAN, COURT WITNESS, SOCIAL ACTIVIST, AND JOURNALIST

On his return home, Kłodziński resumed his studies at the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Medicine and worked for the Kraków Municipal Social Welfare Committee (Miejski Komitet Pomocy Społecznej w Krakowie) providing medical care for concentration camp survivors.

On graduating and completing his national service, Dr Kłodziński started work as a pulmonologist (a specialist for the treatment of lung diseases). He was employed by the Voivodeship Tuberculosis Outpatients' Clinic at the Students' Day Centre for the Treatment of Tuberculosis (Wojewódzka Przychodnia Przeciwgruźlicza w Akademickim Pólsanatorium Przeciwgruźliczym). Many of his patients were survivors left with serious health problems after their concentration camp confinement. He continued his academic career tutored by Professor Stanisław Hornung and wrote a PhD dissertation on TB in Auschwitz and Occupied Poland in 1939–1945. He obtained his PhD in 1962. Dr Stanisław Kłodziński was a member of the Kraków Medical Society and the Polish Pulmonological Society. He worked as a medical practitioner until 1969, when he retired from medical practice.

Dr Kłodziński was a court witness in several trials of members of the staff of Auschwitz. He appeared in court at the trial of Rudolf Höß, the commandant of Auschwitz, which was held in Warsaw before the Polish Supreme Court. He testified as a witness on 21 March 1947, the ninth day of the trial. In November of the same year, another Auschwitz trial, this time of 40 of the camp's staff, started in Kraków, and again Dr Kłodziński was summoned as a witness. In 1959, his statement was part of the evidence collected for a second trial against SS Dr Johann Paul Kremer. Numerous members of the Auschwitz staff were put on trial in Frankfurt-am-Main in 1963–1965, and many of the witnesses testifying were Auschwitz survivors. Dr Kłodziński's statement concerned the prisoners' hospital in Auschwitz, the methods used to kill prisoners, and the conduct of the German doctors.

Dr Kłodziński was a member of very many organisations and associations and made an active contribution to their work. In 1968, he was appointed to the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Nazi German Crimes in Poland and served on its medical team for the investigation of wartime pathology. He belonged

to the International Auschwitz Committee, which has a membership of survivors from various European countries.

He joined the Polish veterans' association ZBoWiD (the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy), served on its Supreme Council, and organised sanatorium treatment for survivors in several health resorts in and beyond Poland. For several years, he ran a doctor's surgery for survivors at Klub Oświęcimiaków w Krakowie (the Kraków Auschwitz Survivors' Club). Later, the surgery moved to his private apartment.

When the museum and memorial site were opened on the premises of the former Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camp, Dr Kłodziński joined a group of survivors (including Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz and Minister Lucjan Motyka) who pioneered the campaign to have the Auschwitz site entered on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Auschwitz was put on the list in 1979.

Dr Kłodziński was engaged in the work to preserve and commemorate the material evidence of Auschwitz. He sat on the council serving as the Auschwitz Museum's advisory body. He was a member of the Kraków branch of Towarzystwo Opieki nad Oświęcimiem, the Society for the Care of the Auschwitz Site, which was founded in 1983 and had a large membership of survivors. He also helped to establish, and later worked in the International Youth Meeting Centre, an educational institution located in Oświęcim. He supported the work of Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (Action Reconciliation Service for Peace), a German church organisation whose members engaged in voluntary service on behalf of the Auschwitz Museum;



Photo 4. | Dr Stanisław Kłodziński. Postwar photo.
Courtesy of APMA-B

and made a vigorous contribution to the activities of Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk, another German church organisation engaged in charity and humanitarian projects.

Dr Kłodziński corresponded with very many people all over the world and acted as a consultant for numerous history projects. He attended numerous conferences and helped many of his fellow survivors by writing letters on support of their applications for housing, medical treatment, or disability pensions.

He published over 300 scholarly papers, starting with medical issues (usually on TB or epidemiology) but later went on to subjects connected with concentration camps, especially the medical, psychiatric, and social after-effects of confinement in them. Some of his work is available in a five-volume publication in Polish entitled *Okupacja i medycyna*, as well as in other books in Polish, *Oświęcim nieznany* and *Więźniowie Oświęcimia*.

Every January from 1961 to 1991, the Kraków branch of the Polish Medical Society issued a special publication edited by Dr Kłodziński on matters concerning medicine in Auschwitz. He contributed over 140 articles to the series, dozens of them presenting the biographies of prisoner doctors and other medical staff imprisoned in Auschwitz. In his articles, he addressed some of the key issues concerning life in Auschwitz. He enjoyed the trust and confidence of fellow survivors who were happy to respond to his requests for information with as many details as they could remember. His colleagues on the team editing the series were Antoni Kępiński, Zdzisław J. Ryn, Zenon Jagoda, Jan Masłowski, and Danuta Wesołowska. Dr Stanisław Kłodziński died on 1 November 1990 and was laid to rest in Rakowicki Cemetery, Kraków, in a funeral attended by his family and friends, and a large number of fellow concentration camp survivors.

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