

This project is a biography of Alexander Weissberg-Cybulski (1901 – 1964) and his many contemporaries who lived through the period of convulsive changes in East-Central Europe. Though his life was quite unique, his life-decisions, peregrinations, successes and defeats will illustrate the fate of his entire generation. Born in Kraków to a German-speaking Jewish merchant family, Weissberg grew up in Vienna where he became a physicist and engineer and joined the Austrian Communist party. In the late twenties he moved to Berlin where he became part of a multi-national left-wing milieu of intellectuals, artists and scientists. From there he travelled for work to the Soviet Union, only to spend three years in Kharkov, Kiev and Moscow prisons. He described that experience in one of the most famous cold war anti-Stalinists books *Hexensabbat* (1951, *Wielka czystka* in Polish). Delivered by the NKVD to the Gestapo in January of 1940, he miraculously survived five years in the Nazi occupied Poland. In his post-war years, he was a businessman, writer, anti-communist participating in the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and friend of the Polish émigré *Kultura* group. Among many friends and collaborators of Weissberg the study will profile his first wife, the ceramist Eva Zeisel, her mother Laura Polanyi and her uncle, scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi; writers Arthur Koestler, Józef Czapski, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński; physicists Victor Weisskopf and Leo Szilard, and others. Their intellectual and ideological choices with their consequences will illuminate important phenomena in the catastrophic twentieth-century East-Central European history: Jewish assimilation through education and politics, social mobility limited by violence and discrimination, internationalism versus national affiliation, family discontinuities, and geographic displacement. The research should produce a new in-depth social history of the twentieth century East-Central European life.