

## *The Sardinian Shoah Memorial, an example of local / International historical Institute. The Researches about Hungary*

### INTRODUCTION

#### GENERAL HISTORY ABOUT JEWS AND SARDINIA BEFORE XIX-XX. CENTURY

In relation to the Jews in Sardinia before the 20th century, it is worth remembering that the presence of Jews in Cagliari is attested as early as the 6th century in a letter from Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) to the local bishop. In the 13th and 14th centuries, under the Pisans and then under Alfonso the Benign, the Jews were allowed to live in a part of the city's castle in the Santa Croce area and to carry out trade, although they were subject to certain obligations. In the 15th century, the living conditions of the Jews of Cagliari worsened, with the tightening of anti-Jewish regulations, until the expulsion decree.

On 31 July 1492, the 70 Jewish families of Cagliari left the island. Their property was confiscated. Those who survived the crossing found refuge in Naples, North Africa or Istanbul. The synagogue of Cagliari was transformed into the Catholic Basilica of Santa Croce which still preserves clearly visible traces of the original structure, despite all the subsequent renovations.<sup>1</sup>

Another very large Jewish community was present in Alghero where, in the 14th and 15th centuries, the Jews enjoyed great freedom and contributed decisively, especially thanks to the powerful Carcassona family, to the economic and cultural development of the city. In the port remains the imposing Tower of the Jews, built by the local Jews with funding from Cagliari. The synagogue and the cemetery date back to 1381 and 1383 and were expanded in the following century. The wealth and prestige that for centuries had guaranteed the Jews of Alghero immunity from countless anti-Jewish provisions were worth nothing in the face of the general expulsion decree of 1492.

It was not until 1848, with the edict of tolerance promulgated by Carlo Alberto, King of Sardinia and Piedmont (1831–1849), that a Jewish presence in Sardinia was seen again, consisting mostly of professionals present in the territory for work reasons or of people married to inhabitants of Sardinia. However, a series of documents preserved in the state archives of Cagliari and in other historical institutes confirm that the presence of Jews in Sardinia was documented as early as 1720, with the passage of Sardinia to a territory under Piedmontese jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup>

#### INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN SARDINIA AND HUNGARY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

##### Before the Holocaust: Ernő Egri Erbstein and the Cagliari football club

Ernő (Ernesto) Egri Erbstein (Nagyvárad, 13 May 1898 – Superga, 4 May 1949) was a Hungarian footballer and manager, who died in the Superga tragedy.

Erbstein was born in 1898 into a Jewish family in Nagyvárad – today Oradea – in Transylvania, at the time a Hungarian province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and today in Romania.

<sup>1</sup> Sacerdoti 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Cugusi 2002.

When he was two years old his family settled in Budapest and he grew up there, graduating from the local high school of physical education.<sup>3</sup> He also joined the local athletics association, the Budapesti Atlétikai Klub [Budapest Athletic Club], which also had a football team, BAK Budapest, which hired him as a midfielder and where he remained from 1915 to 1924. After graduating he began to work as a stockbroker and, even if football took a back seat, he always played for BAK. In 1924, however, Olympia Fiume, later to become Fiumana, noticed him and brought him to Italy.

After a period between the football clubs of Fidelis Andria, Bari and Nocerina, in the year 1930, Egri Erbstein went to Sardinia, and to the Cagliari football club. However, it can almost be said that it was Erbstein who brought modern football to Sardinia. In 1930, ten years after the birth of the red and blue club, the Hungarian coach, fresh from his first experiences on the bench at Fidelis Andria, Bari and Nocerina, was called to lead the Sardinians in the Southern Division championship. The union between Erbstein and Cagliari was a success. The rossoblù won group F of the Prima Divisione tournament and the subsequent final group of the Mezzogiorno, managing to access the Serie B championship for the first time. Here too, the men under the orders of the Hungarian coach achieved an excellent placing, a thirteenth place that was worth salvation.<sup>4</sup>

The following year he took the Sardinians to thirteenth place in the Serie B championship. Also in 1931, his second daughter, Marta, was born in Budapest. After 1932, Erbstein is transferred first to Bari soccer club, then to Lucca.<sup>5</sup>

In Lucca, Erbstein was praised and certainly would have willingly stayed, but the first fascist racial laws issued, starting in 1938, hit him directly. His reasons for apprehension, especially for his family, must be taken into serious consideration. He finds himself no longer able to send his daughters to public school. He thus decides to accept the offer of the Piemontese management of the Granata to lead Torino.

After a last competition, the 29 January 1939, the Hungarian coach manages to reach an agreement with Feyenoord thanks to Molnár (who, among other things, had got him a job with Olympia Fiume years earlier), who sat on the Dutch bench before moving to Torino. Unfortunately, Erbstein will never arrive in Rotterdam: the train he is traveling on is stopped in Kleve, on the border between Germany and the Netherlands and he is not allowed to enter the Netherlands (despite the visa issued by the consulate and the contract already signed with the Feyenoord). He is therefore forced to spend several months in Germany, where, however, as a Jew, he is welcomed by practically no one. The only solution, therefore, is to return to Budapest, where some of Ernest's relatives still lived

In March 1944, Ernst is arrested and interned in a work camp, from which he escaped just some days before a deportation of all the inmates to Auschwitz Birkenau, and the 20 December 1944, is rescued thanks to Raoul Wallemborg, the Swedish Embassy functionary who saved thousands of Jews by the Holocaust, and survived.

After the liberation, he is recontacted by the Torino soccer club and proposed to be newly the coach of the regenerate football club. With him the Football team of Torino will be really great and became in all the Italy "the Great Torino", but the destiny will be really cruel, when the 4 May 1949 the airplane in which he's traveling had a crash in the Superga mountains, with no survivors.<sup>6</sup>

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3 Cerutti 2013.

4 <https://www.vistanet.it/cagliari/2022/01/27/lo-sapevate-erno-erbstein-lallenatore-ebreo-del-cagliari-sopravvisse-alla-shoah-e-mori-a-superga/> (last access: 27 November 2024).

5 Alessandro Matta, the Association for the Holocaust Memorial in Sardinia, an example of local-International historical research, Budapest 30 May 2024, International Conference of the new approaches in methodology of the Holocaust Museums.

6 Amato de Serpis 2016.

## During the Holocaust: Miklós Deutsch, an incredible Hungarian–Italo–Sardinian Story

Only recently, last 11 May 2024, a skype call with Anna Maria Deutsche reveal us this unknown history.

Miklós Deutsch born in 1910 in Zombor (today Sombor in Serbia), from Izidor Deutsch and Anna Sonnenfeld, it's the first son of the couple after a son born dead, and in 1912 born from them the sister Rose. The parents of Miklós were originally from Szeged, and his mother Anna Sonnenfeld had, previous of his marriage with Izidor Deutsch, another marriage with Alexander Weisz with 4 sons, Dezső, Ernő, Irén and Tilda.<sup>7</sup>

Izidor it was a beautiful and calm man, really with an incredible memory and a mathematical ability in counting numbers. Thanks to her mother, Miklós received also a musical instruction, becoming really good as a pianist, the instrument taught by Anna in Zombor.<sup>8</sup>

The family lived in Zombor until the end of first world war, and in 1920, cause the Treaty of Trianon, and the mutilation of Hungary and generally on the territories of ancient Austro-Hungarian empire, Zombor was assigned to Yugoslavia, and Anna and her family decided to remain in Hungary, moving to Rákospalota, a suburb of Budapest.

Becoming adult after secondary schools, Miklós decided to study dental medicine, to became a dentist, but it clash with the first terrible antisemitic laws of Horthy-regime the so-called "Numerus clausus" who restricted the access of the jews to the Hungarian universities <sup>9</sup> Because of all of that, he decided to move to study in Italy, and to Genova, to study here medicine for became dentist and to work as a concertist pianist to pay for self the studies.

Here he knows, during one of his soirées, Miss Maria Vittoria Olivari, a woman living in Genova but of Sardinian origin, the future mother of Anna Maria Deutsch about I was talking in the beginning of the paragraph, but no one of them know that they will be united after the war. In the meantime, of their knowledge and the life in Genova, in 1936, in Rákospalota the situation for the parents of Miklós was really falling down in bad because the siege of Rákospalota was a really fear fascist and antisemitic, and he expel all the Jews from the suburb, convincing the Deutsch family to sell their house and to return in Zombor, where they stay only until 1940.<sup>10</sup>

In meantime, in Italy, in September 1938, the breakup of antisemitic legislation laws put in a particularly situation all the Hungarian Jews. With a separate pact between Hitler and Mussolini, the Hungarian Jews must be expelled from Italy and repatriated to Hungary.<sup>11</sup> It was also the destiny of Miklós, that interrupted his studies, expelled from university and returned, leaving Maria Vittoria, in Hungary and going to live in Budapest.

Also, the mother of Miklós, Anna, when also her daughter Rose (sister of Miklós) was in danger because the German invasion of France where she lived until that year, decided to move immediately to Budapest to stay here with her son. They survived the siege of the Ghetto until 1944 and until the liberation.<sup>12</sup>

In meantime in Budapest, Miklós go to live in Rákospalota, alone and without all, re-meet Magda Sonnenfeld, a cousin of him (daughter of Emil, the brother of her mother, Anna,) and marry her, but the marriage was too short. Miklós it was immediately call in 1942 for the forced

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7 Ce je que sais de Miklos Deutsch. Reconstruction of life of Miklos Deutsch by the daughter of Anna Sonnenfeld first Iren Weisz. Deutsch family document achieved in Associazione Memoriale Sardo della Shoah archives.

8 Iren Weisz, cit.

9 Vági-Csósz-Kádár 2013.

10 Iren Weisz, cit.

11 Vági-Csósz-Kádár 2013. About the legislation of Italy against Jews, I suggest Sarfatti 2018.

12 Iren Weisz, cit.

work by the Hungarians,<sup>13</sup> and in 1944 it was also deported in Germany with the death march in the concentration camps of Dachau and Flossenburg.<sup>14</sup>

Liberated in 1945 in Flossenburg, thanks to an Italian man (we don't know until today if it was a priest or an ex-army prisoner of the camp) it was re-conducted in Italy and in Genova.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, Magdi, his wife, was also arrested in May 1944, and deported from Budapest in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and from there transferred to Ravensbruck, Buchenwald and finally Penig, where she was liberated by the Americans, the 17 April 1945.<sup>16</sup> Returned to Budapest, she was really many sick and many weakly, and she died only few days after her arrive in the town, and she was buried in Jewish Cemetery of Kerepesi street in Budapest. For a strange coincidence of destiny, the mother of Miklós, Anna Sonnenfeld, also survived the siege of the Ghetto but she died in the beginning of 1945 in Budapest due to malnutrition cause the shortage of food in the town after the war, and she also was buried in the Jewish cemetery of Kerepesi street.<sup>17</sup>

Miklós, in Italy, restarted to study, and after the degree in dental care, he begins to work in a dentist study in Genova. For an incredible destiny coincidence, one afternoon, Maria Vittoria Olivari, with a big surprise, appear in his study and in his ambulatory for a dental care, and he re-meets "Miklós the pianist..." that was disappeared from the town in 1938 and about that didn't know that he was also a pianist... the two were reunited after almost seven years of separation, and they decided to marry and go to live in Sardinia, in the Island of origin of his wife.<sup>18</sup>

Miklós returned in Hungary only one time in 1966, with his new "Sardinian" family to re-meet his family and only during that visit know all the truth about his cousin and wife Magdi, about he known until that moment only that she was died during the Holocaust.<sup>19</sup>

## **After the Holocaust: Edith Bruck and the Sardinia**

Born in Tiszabercel, in 1931, as Edith Steinschreiber, today Edith Bruck, she must know as a big writer and a Holocaust Survivor (deported from her village in 1944) and also an activist for the tolerance and against antisemitism.<sup>20</sup>

Less known is her story after the Holocaust, that she also very connected to the Sardinia Island. In 1954, after the years of wedding in Israel and the divorce, before the years in Rome and the encounter with Nelo Risi (her life love), Edith passed lot of time in Sardinia, living in Decimoputzu (little town near Cagliari) hosted by a poor family that give to her a big hospitality<sup>21</sup>.

After this time, in reconnaissance of all this, Edith maintains with Sardinia a big feeling, and when she worked in Rai-Radiotelevisione Italiana as an Author and also a director (for example in the show TELEMATCH in 1957), in 1983, she realized the beautiful documentary "*Quale Sardegna?*" (How Sardinia?), a very incredible and beautiful documentary about the territories and landscapes of our Island.<sup>22</sup>

The 28 September 2023, Edith Bruck reached the Laurea Honoris Causa in Philosophical Sciences from Sassari University.<sup>23</sup>

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13 Iren Weisz, cit.

14 Bad Arolsen International tracking service, personal file of Miklos Deutsch born in Zombor in 1910, camps of Flossenburg and Dachau.

15 Iren Weisz, cit.

16 Bad Arolsen International tracking service, personal files of Magda Deutsch born Sonnenfeld, born in Budapest in 1916, camps of Penig, Buchenwald, Ravensbruck and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

17 Iren Weisz, cit.

18 Anna Maria Deusch, Internet Skype conversation with the author the 12 May 2024.

19 Iren Weisz, cit.

20 Bruck 2023.

21 Edith Bruck, meeting online via zoom with the secondary school of Decimoputzu (Ca), Decimoputzu the 27 January 2023.

22 *Quale Sardegna?* Film by Edith Bruck. Italy 1983.

23 <https://www.uniss.it/it/eventi/laurea-honoris-causa-edith-bruck> (last access: 27 November 2024).

## CONCLUSIONS: WHAT WE CAN SEE IN THESE BIOGRAPHIES?

This Historical research about the Jews of Sardinia, or with Sardinian connection, attempt to answer to these questions:

- 1) How many were the Jews in Sardinia between 1933-1945?
- 2) These families or people, how were "touched" by the Shoah events? (from Sardinia never a deportation because sardinian island is free after 8 September 1943)
- 3) We can talk with these familiar/personal stories about a "holocaust local history" of the Sardinia Island?
- 4) What about the Connection with other places? (ex: Hungary)

With this article, an incredible connection in history of the Holocaust between Hungary and Sardinia is well proved, with proof study of biographies, documents and also new recently discovered familiar histories.

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