

Amalia Dinger: A Life and Death

In this chapter, I want to show where 'my' family story starts, or rather where one particular part of the story begins, and also to show how individual people are affected by history, and in this case, the events of the 1930s and 1940s in Europe. I want to explore why particular events which make up what is now called the Holocaust will forever be the most important historical event for Jewish people, wherever and whenever they live. It might be said that we have heard or read similar stories to the story that follows and that what I write will be nothing new. But for me, it is important to go through it all again - because in telling the story of my grandmother, Amalia, she is lifted out of, extracted and identified from the many, unnamed millions who perished at the terrible time when the entire world seemed to be at war.

The focus here is on an individual, a member of my family, my maternal grandmother whom I never knew, and who until recently was just a fading sepia image in an old photograph, a name on a list, the subject of a 1947 official message of condolence. My mother did not talk about her own mother much, perhaps because it was too painful; so I had only fleeting glimpses into my maternal grandmother's life. But in trying to put together Amalia's story, the intention is to re-create her, and so, as well as depicting her terrible end, I want to show other, more optimistic parts of her life, so that she is not forever just another Holocaust victim. So I explore the hopes and expectation of her childhood spent in the small Jewish town of Brody, the stability and relative comfort of her middle years in sophisticated Vienna, and so on. I also attempt to show what it must have felt like to be faced by the gradual advance of Nazi power, the disbelief at what was happening and the horror of it all. I attempt to trace what Amalia saw and how she felt as she was exiled from Vienna first to the concentration camp at Theresenstadt and then to the death camp at Treblinka where her life was snuffed out.

From the few photographs and pieces that were left behind and from the accounts of others that shared at least some of her life's experiences, I hope to re-imagine the person that my mother loved best, (apart perhaps from me) and who most shaped her character and perspective on life, which in turn, helped shape what I have become. So not only was

Amalia a victim of the Holocaust but she was my mother's beloved mother and my un-met grandmother.

Amalia Moszkowicz Dinger and David Hirsch Dinger



I have only a couple of photographs of Amalia, both taken in relative old age. However Amalia had a youth (in Brody, now in the Ukraine) and a busy life in Vienna in early married life and in her middle years. Her husband David Hirsch Dinger, my maternal grandfather, died in 1928, and she became head of household. I know this because I have seen a document in the Vienna municipal archive which shows the transfer of the lease of the flat the family were living in, from her husband to her. So it is these parts of her life that I wish to revive – not only the later, darker part.

Part 1: Brody

Amalia (also known as Malke, her Jewish name) Moszkowicz Dinger was born on 4th November 1873 in Brody in the far eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. She was born into the Moszkowicz -Dinger family, part of the deeply religious Jewish community and culture of the shtetl town (more of that later). Brody still exists but is now very different from the town where Amalia grew up. It lies in the middle of a great plain and archaeological digs have revealed that the surrounding area was inhabited by humans long before the name Brody appeared. The original name Brod means ford and was derived from the town's proximity to the Styr River where the river narrows, and therefore where it could be forded and crossed. Brody lies in the west part of Ukraine close to the present Polish border, over 50 miles from the largest city in the region, L'viv (also known as Lvov and in German as Lemberg). It is 187 miles westwards of Kiev, Ukraine's present-day capital, and only a few miles west of the previous border with Imperial Russia. Because it was close to the Russia border, Brody had many conquerors over the centuries and was governed by

many regimes and empires, yet also thrived on the trade (of goods and ideas) that this location brought.

The modern town began as a military post, established by one Stanislaw Koniecpolski, a Polish military leader who built fortifications in 1633 to repel the invading Tartars and their Turkish allies. The town remained under the control of Polish overlords, though attracted significant numbers of Armenians, Scots, Greeks and Jews when laws were passed allowing more autonomy to cities and villages. This meant that Jews were allowed to live in the town, which was not the case in other places. By the end of the 16th century, 400 Jewish families were living in Brody, the prosperity of which may be judged by the construction in the next (17th) century of a large synagogue, generally referred to as the 'old fortress synagogue'. Built to withstand assaults, the synagogue was a sturdy cube with fortifications at its base, and still exists today though in ruined form.

The synagogue at Brody today



Towards the end of the 17th century, the Jewish quarter of Brody was destroyed by fire and following this, Jews were granted permission to live in other areas of the city, and allowed to pursue a wide range of trades including distilling spirits, making and selling handicrafts and conducting other commercial enterprises in return for payment of high taxes. By mid-18th century, Jews dominated trade in Brody and the town's Jewish artisans became famous locally for weaving and metalwork. During a four-year war which led to the partition of Poland in 1772 and the formation of the region of Galicia, the Jews of Brody were compelled to feed the armies in transit through the city. Brody, along with the rest of Galicia, came under Austrian domination, one outcome of which was that the tax burden on Jewish merchants was reduced and greater freedom was allowed to Jewish craftsmen and their guilds.

Brody was made a free trade city, a status it enjoyed for more than a century, with the Napoleonic wars and various trade blockades enhancing its status as a conduit city or

channel of trade between Russia and Austria. Brody thus extended its economic influence way beyond Poland and Austria to become one of the most important trading centres of Central and Eastern Europe.

By the 1790s, just under a century before Amalia's birth, the Jewish citizens of Brody were prosperous enough to build new houses and engage in businesses such as the sale of hemp, linen, wax, honey and tobacco in exchange for cotton, French silk, spices, beads, jewels, sugar, wool, feathers, horses and fur. This was the peak of Brody's prosperity, and by Amalia's birth in 1873, a decline was beginning to set in, due initially to trade restrictions re-imposed by the Viennese-based government, and later, the cancellation of the free trade patent. This decline continued into the new (twentieth) century, in particular because there was no industry to offset the downturn in trade, as could be found in other urban areas at the time.

Without work, attracted to the sophisticated urbanism of Vienna and wishing to escape both the religious shackles of Jewish shtetl life and religious persecution, young couples like Amalia and her future husband David Hirsch moved westwards to Vienna. Others like two of David's sisters left for England and yet others went to America. Between 1880 and 1910 the Jewish population of Brody halved, from 20,000 to 10,000 and after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War 1 (in 1918), Brody once more came under Polish control which was to last until the outbreak of World War II.

Inter-war Polish society was less hostile to its Jewish citizens than other European countries: so the Jewish community in Brody continued to subsist and develop, even if its younger people saw their future as elsewhere. In the end, the fate of Brody's Jews was decided when the Nazis occupied the town in 1942. Brody's Jewish inhabitants were first crowded into the ghetto, and then deported and murdered mainly at Auschwitz. The Nazi era signalled the end of Jewish shtetl life. Of the 10,000 Jews living in Brody prior to the outbreak of the War, only 88 people survived and even fewer returned. By this time, however, Amalia and her husband, and I assume, other members of the family were long gone, although some may have remained in Brody until the end. There is no way of knowing as most Holocaust victims were not dignified with graves. I was informed by the archivist at the Jewish records office in Vienna that records show several people with the name Dinger living in Brody in the nineteenth century. There are some graves with the name of Hirsch (in

Yiddish) in Brody's old Jewish cemetery, and several with the name of Moscizker/Moshtzisker. However, as elsewhere, Jewish burials more or less ceased in 1938.

Interestingly, despite the huge loss of Jews in the Nazi era and beyond, Ukrainian Jews remain the fourth largest Jewish community world-wide (after the USA, Israel and France). They are mainly concentrated in the capital Kiev (110,000), Dnipropetrovsk (60,000), Kharkov (45,000) and Odessa (45,000) and scattered among many of the smaller towns. However, in Western Ukraine (former Galicia) only a small remnant of its former Jewish population remains; approximately 12,000 in all split between L'viv and Chernivtsi; none in Brody. Nowadays, it is only a few older Jewish people who claim Yiddish as their mother tongue (in 1926, it was over three-quarters) with the majority of present-day Ukrainian Jews speaking predominantly Russian or Ukrainian.

So what was shtetl culture like? What did Amalia see around her as she grew up? Shtetls were small towns located mainly in the areas of the Pale of Settlement, created by Catherine II ('The Great') of Russia in 1791 under pressure to rid Moscow of Jewish business competition and their 'evil' influence on the Russian masses. The Pale covered parts of the Russian Empire, Poland, Galicia and Romania - today this would be Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Ukraine, and parts of western Russia. Ninety percent of Russian Jews were forced into the Pale, to live in poverty and hardship. Even then, they had to pay double the amount of taxes compared to other citizens and were forbidden to own land or run taverns or become properly educated. Jews prospered despite the discrimination against them, as evidenced in the expansion of the population, from 1.6 million in 1820 to 5.6 million in 1910.

Some liberalisation in the treatment of Jews was noticeable in the mid 1800s, but this was reversed in 1882 when laws were passed to restrict Jews further to the towns of the Pale. These became even more overcrowded, limiting yet further Jews' possibility for trade or commerce. At this time, in the 1870s and 1880s, the Jewish population also became the targets of devastating pogroms, that is, violent mob attacks against them, approved or at least not opposed by the government or military authorities. Terrible living conditions and increased persecution combined to make other countries more attractive even if far distant. There was mass immigration to the United States (two million between 1881 and 1914) as well as increased interest in Zionism aimed at the creation of a Jewish state where Jews

would be safe. Only in 1917 was the Pale of Settlement abolished following the overthrow of the Czarist regime in the Russian Revolution, and following this, Eastern European Jews were again allowed some freedom of movement.

It is difficult to understand today why the Jews were singled out as so threatening to Russian and later German society, though many explanations have been offered and books written about this. Most believe that the origins of anti-Semitism lay in the biblical and religious disputes between Jews and Christians. However it has proved to be an ambivalent term, self-styled as an ideology and political movement by Wilhelm Marr in 1879 in the form of the 'Antisemites League' to combat 'Semitism' (a predisposition to favour Jews). Yet, as Stephen Beller points out, it has had a variety of psychological undertones,

ranging from the mild pejorative prejudice against Jews to the full-blown pathology of an exterminationist, paranoid hatred of Jews as a race out to destroy Western (Aryan) civilisation; and this psychological understanding of antisemitism has led to the latter being seen as a deep-seated pathology not only within the psyches of individual inhabitants of the West, but of the collective 'discourse' of Western civilisation, and even 'modernity' generally.¹

The term anti-Semitism was first coined in 1860 as a scientific-sounding term for what had been previously known as 'Judenhass' (Jew-hatred). It was used by an Austrian Jewish scholar Moritz Steinschneider to highlight 'anti-Semitic prejudices' in relation to ideas about the supposed inferiority of 'Semitic' to the 'Aryan' 'races'. Such ideas about race and civilization were widespread in Europe in the second half of the 19th century, and even in Britain, Jews were seen by many as untrustworthy and inferior racially to the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish. Different perceptions of Judaism were evoked to create Jews as the 'other' or the outsider in relation to different European societies. On the one hand, Eastern European Jews were regarded as poor, backward and religious, and a drain on the more advanced Western European countries to which they sought entry. On the other hand, Western European Jewry was stereotyped as wealthy and grasping, and as plutocrats who sought to rule the world.

¹ Stephen Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p2, 2007

So, while Amalia's family might have felt secure in its shtetl home town of Brody, the world outside was becoming harsher for Jews. And their right to live similar lives to the rest of the population was once more at risk.

Shtetl towns like Brody were, at the time of Amalia's birth, communities which followed traditional or Orthodox Judaism. They were largely stable, conservative, religious and socially inflexible. As a young woman, Amalia would be aware of the limitations of what she could do. Men were in the dominant positions in the shtetl, controlling the organisation of religion and education as well as commerce. Girls from poorer families faced bleak prospects, especially if they could not find a husband, although behind the scenes, women often played key roles in communal and economic life. There were some opportunities for girls to learn to read and write, and both religious and secular literature in Yiddish were available to them (and to poorer, less educated men)². Brody was a typical shtetl town with Yiddish as its main language (a combination of Hebrew, German, Polish and local dialects), yet it became known also for other things. For example, 'Brodersänger' (singers from Brody) were among the first to perform Yiddish songs in non-religious settings. The singers who resembled medieval troubadours went from place to place, adapting their songs from music played at religious ceremonies. The singers also functioned as cantors in synagogues, that is, trained musicians who led the congregation in melodious prayer. Brodersänger were first mentioned, disapprovingly, by Jewish travellers passing through Brody. The most famous were Berl Margulis (1815-1868) and Benjamin Wolf Ehrenkrantz (1826-1883), the latter of whom perhaps performed in front of Amalia. I have not been able to find any pictures of the Brodersänger, but they probably looked something like the musicians in the photograph below, of musicians from Kazimierz, a Jewish suburb of Krakow in Poland, some hundred or so miles west of Brody.

² 'Shtetl', In: *The Yivo Encyclopedia* at <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtetl>

Jewish performers in Kazimierz, near Krakow, Poland



In the 1890s when Amalia was a teenager, she may well have attended performances of the Brody singers or other travelling Yiddish-language theatre troupes that existed then, organized along the lines of travelling companies in England or Italy. The young Amalia may have developed her appreciation of music and performance from these Jewish troubadours, and when a mother herself, conveyed to her children including my mother, the importance and value of theatre and music.

A traveller from Scotland in 1844 describes Brody as a predominantly Jewish town, with 150 synagogues and prayer rooms and no more than three churches (two Greek orthodox, one Roman Catholic)³. Brody here seems to have been a near ideal settled, thriving shtetl society. The traveller provides a detailed picture as we can see:

The streets in general are tolerably clean, and there is a side-pavement entirely of wood. The appearance of the population was certainly the most singular we had witnessed. It seemed wholly a Jewish city, and the few Gentiles who appeared here and there were quite lost in the crowd of Jews. Jewish boys and girls were playing in the streets and Jewish maid-servants carrying messages; Jewish women were the only females to be seen at the doors and windows; and Jewish merchants filled the market place. The high fur caps of the men, the rich head-dresses of the women, and the small round velvet caps of the boys met the eye on every side as we wandered from street to street. Jewish ladies were leaning over balconies, and poor

³ Extracted from 'Mission of Inquiry to the Jews of Brody', in *Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews from the Church of Scotland in 1839* (Edinburgh: William Whyte & Co, 1844). Accessed 01-02-2011, http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/brody/mission_of_inquiry.htm

old Jewesses were sitting at stalls selling fruit. In passing through the streets, if we happened to turn the head for a moment toward a shop, some Jew would rush out immediately and assail us with importunate invitations to come and buy. In the bazaar, Jews were selling skins, making shoes, and offering earthenware for sale; and the sign-boards of plumbers, masons, painters and butchers all bore Jewish names. In the fish market, the same kind of wrangling and squabbling heard in our own markets was carried on by Jewesses buying and selling. Jewesses also presided at the flesh and poultry market and in a plentifully stored green-market....

There are perhaps forty rich Jews in the city . . . but the greater part are poor.... Most of the rising generation are giving up the study of the Talmud [book of Jewish laws], and several have been baptized. There is some learning among them; for in one synagogue we met with several lads who understood and spoke Hebrew. Many of the young men are beginning to attend the Government schools, in which they are taught Latin and acquire general knowledge. The rabbi of the New School speaks Latin and French.

So, we can see that while Brody was to all purposes a stable and flourishing Jewish community in 1844, new ideas and changes were in the air. The young and ambitious were beginning to reject Yiddish in favour of the national language of German (and French) and some were even giving up their Jewish faith. Meanwhile others were setting their sights westwards towards the burgeoning cities of central Europe.

The noted European writer, Joseph Roth, born in Brody in 1897 some 20 years after Amalia, argues that generally, shtetl culture was under-appreciated and wrongly dismissed, especially by those who lived it. In his 1927 account in of Jewish migrations from East to West following World War I and the changes he witnessed in Russia, he wrote that:

...conversely, the Eastern Jew sees none of the advantages of his homeland. He sees nothing of the boundless horizon, nothing of the quality of the people, in whom simplicity can produce holy men and murderers, melodies of the melancholy,

grandeur, and obsessive passion....The Eastern Jew fails to see the beauty of the East.⁴

As already noted, little is known about Amalia's immediate family. What documents exist suggest that the family name of her father was Dinger and that of her mother was Moszkowicz, and that she had at least one sister Frieda (born 8th July 1877, and living with the family in Vienna until 1941, and one brother, Sigmund (born in 1869: see photographs of both below). As already noted, there is also evidence of previous generations of the Dinger family. Other than that, there is little more to say about Amalia's life or family in Brody. The hope is, however, that the reader will have gained some sense of the conditions of Amalia's childhood in Brody and why she wanted to leave.

Part 2: Vienna

Vienna where Amalia spent most of the rest of her life and where she gave birth to my mother, Steffi and the rest of her children was as different to Brody as London is to one of the outposts of the British Empire - when Britain had an empire that is. So, in making the move to Vienna, Amalia was taking a huge step into the unknown. Other members of the family moved elsewhere at this time as already noted - to Britain (London) and probably to the United States or perhaps South America.

It is likely that Amalia and David went through a Jewish marriage ceremony before they moved to Vienna. Otherwise, one imagines, their respective (and respectable) families would not have allowed them to leave. For Jews from Eastern Europe at the time, the West (and that included Vienna) signified the opportunity to live a better life with greater freedom and more possibilities of work. From engineers from the West, they had learnt about new technologies and inventions; from traders and travellers, they had heard new ideas being advanced in books and literature; and from travelling artists and musicians, they became acquainted with Western trends in fashion and culture – all of which evoked a *modern* world which must have seemed inescapably glamorous and enticing. They did not

⁴ Roth, Joseph. *The Wandering Jews*. (1927) trans. M. Hofmann. London: Granta, p. 6, 2001

anticipate the blackened factory chimneys, the squalor, and as Roth describes, the 'sheer hatred' that they would find when they got to the West.

There is no record of when Amalia arrived in Vienna or with whom she travelled, although she will have undoubtedly come by train, first to L'viv (the main town in the region of Galicia) and then via Krakow to Vienna. There may have been relatives in Vienna who had arranged accommodation and work possibilities or David may have gone on ahead to oversee such arrangements. Amalia's younger sister Frieda may well have accompanied her. One can only imagine how exciting it must have been for them to leave their provincial home town for the bright lights of Vienna. From the invitation sent to her brother Sigmund Dinger in Lemberg (L'viv), we know that Amalia took part in an official marriage ceremony with David Hirsch at the main synagogue in Vienna on 3rd September 1899. She was 25. This was to ratify formally the previous religious ceremony and to ensure legitimacy to the couple's first child, Malvine, born some six months later. Curiously, the names of the wedding couple on the invitation are Amalia Dinger and David Hirsch, although one would expect it to be the other way round, as the family name of my mother and her brother and sisters was Dinger. However, it seems that the couple adopted Amalia's family name (Dinger) instead of David's family name (Hirsch) when they married.

From my mother I learnt that Amalia and David were first cousins. Marriage within the family was more common in those days because families were much larger than they are today; a family of ten children or more was not unusual. As a consequence, most socialising took place within the family and immediate relations, at occasions marking religious festivals as well as births, marriages and deaths. So falling in love with the daughter or son of an uncle or aunt at one of the many social family occasions that young family members would attend, was accepted – and at least there would be no doubt about the suitability of the background of those involved.

Why Dinger rather than Hirsch was adopted as a family name is not clear. The name Moszkowicz appears (in Amalia's children's birth certificates), so we can assume that this was Amalia's mother's family name. Certainly, in the Jewish Cemetery at Brody and from the Jewish Records Office in Vienna we can see that there were many people called Hirsch including several rabbis, and perhaps it was a more prosperous branch of the family with business connections in Vienna. There are a few references to Moszkowicz and even fewer

to Dinger. So it could be that the Dinger part of the family originated from elsewhere. For example, the only people with Dinger as their family name on Yad Vashem's database of Shoah victims are three from Odessa (Nina born 1869, Anna born 1901, and Basya, born 1891) and a Hermann Dinger born 1876 in Merseburg in Saxony. Odessa lies in the south of present day Ukraine on the Black Sea and may have been the place where a branch of Amalia's family known as Dinger originated. There was a tradition of movement between Brody and Odessa, and indeed Galician and German Jews in Odessa were styled 'Broder' Jews after the city of Brody, and were influential throughout the nineteenth century.⁵ Nina, three years older than Amalia, could have been perhaps a distant cousin.

Another explanation for keeping the mother's name was that in Brody, most wedding ceremonies would have been religious rather than legal, and therefore children, considered illegitimate by the authorities, would have taken their mother's rather than father's name. Or Amalia and David may have adopted Dinger as a family name because it sounded less Jewish, in line with many other Jews who altered their names so as to fit more easily into their newly adopted countries. But these are mere speculations and it is unlikely that we shall ever find out the complete truth.

So, we find that David Hirsch has moved in 1899 from Brody to Vienna because Nestrogasse, 4/3 is the address on the wedding invitation to which people are asked to reply. It is likely that the couple would have already been living together there because Amalia was already David's wife in the eyes of her Jewish family and the Jewish community, if not the state. Frieda may have made the initial journey with Amalia (with or without David) or may have come for the (formal) wedding or may even have come to Vienna later, on the birth of Amalia's first or second child.

Several later addresses are given for the family Dinger in Vienna. The young couple had two children at the Nestroygasse apartment: Malvine, born 9th February 1900 who did not survive to adulthood (we have no record of the date of her death) and Gisela, born in 18th July 1901. The family then moved to another perhaps larger apartment in Föstergasse, living there until 1924. This is where my mother and her younger sisters and brothers were born. Both these apartments were damaged in the war and the blocks rebuilt, so it is

⁵ The unedited full-text of the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, downloaded from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11660-odessa>

difficult to ascertain with any certainty what their conditions were and the reasons for the next and last move.

The family moved again in 1924 to no. 2 flat 12 Krummbaumgasse, a probably larger apartment in a newer building and perhaps nearer to the shoe shop, owned (or rather managed) by the family. The Krummbaumgasse building is located in what was clearly a more prosperous part of Leopoldstadt. Situated along one side of Carmelite Market square, it is a tall multi-story building with an impressively large front door and a long, winding staircase. On one of my visits, I was allowed into the building but unfortunately could not gain access to apartment 12 where the Dingers lived. It was from Krummbaumgasse that different members of family departed from Vienna for the last time.

Main door and stairs of the Krummbaumgasse building



All three addresses are in Vienna's 2nd district which is historically a Jewish area known as Leopoldstadt, and was perhaps where other relations or neighbours from Brody settled on arrival to Vienna.

At the time of the couple's arrival in Vienna, it was at the peak of its influence as capital of the massive, multicultural Austro-Hungarian Empire, even if in its final years of full prosperity. Franz Joseph I was Emperor of Austria as well as King of Bohemia, Croatia and Hungary. He had come to the throne in 1848 aged 18 years and remained there until his death in 1916, one of the longest ever serving monarchs in Europe. At the time the couple were settling in, Franz Joseph had been emperor for more than half a century and had transformed Vienna from an old medieval city into a modern metropolis with a great arc of imperial buildings which included a City Hall, Parliament, opera house, museum and university. The new Ring road (Ringstrasse) edged also by palaces and other ornamental residences of the rich and powerful had its back to the old city wall, and its face towards a

politically, culturally and architecturally magnificent future. The creation of this opulence took decades of building and for many years Vienna must have been a massive building site. But by the time Amalia and David arrived, the buildings, parks and open spaces were all complete, and they must have been much in awe as they viewed the huge neo-classical buildings and marble statuary – all so different from Brody.

Jews had been prominent in the rebuilding of Vienna and there were a number of palaces and grand buildings along the Ringstrasse built and inhabited by recently rich Jewish families, for instance, the Ephrussi brothers originally from Odessa in Russia⁶. However, most Jews lived elsewhere, in the poorer parts of the city such as Leopoldstadt. 'Go to the slums of Vienna, Leopoldstadt', De Waal writes, 'and you can see Jews living as Jews should live, twelve in a room, no water, loud on the street, wearing the right robes, speaking the right argot'⁷. These poorer Jews would have borne some resemblance to those pictured below, and their lives would have been closer to those in Brody than their richer brethren living in the 1st district of the Ringstrasse who lived a much more westernised and secular existence.

House of Prayer, Judenstrasse, Vienna, 1933



Jews had cause to be grateful to Emperor Franz Josef because in 1867, he had removed the last barriers to their full citizenship; in particular they were now able to own property. This was important for the revival of Vienna since Jewish families made rich by trade but

⁶ De Waal, Edmund. *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*, London: Vintage Books, 118.

⁷ De Waal, 118

restricted by law from buying land and engaging in professions, could now invest in the rebuilding of the city. Following the pull factors of this decree and greater freedom offered by Vienna, and the push factors of pogroms and persecution elsewhere, Jews increasingly moved into the city and the Jewish community began to expand, from 6, 217 in 1857 (2.16 percent of the population) to 72,000 in 1880 (10 percent) and by the turn of the twentieth century, there were 100,000, mostly living in or near Leopoldstadt. The flow from East to West continued, from Galicia, Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary, with the incomers initially at least continuing their home practices of speaking Yiddish, wearing robes rather than modern dress and openly displaying their religious allegiance and devoutness.

However by Amalia and David's arrival in Vienna, a second and even third generation of Jews was beginning to flex its intellectual and secular muscles, the children of parents who had made the break with the East some three or four decades before. These new generations of Jews came into prominence in the city in different areas of public and civic life: banking, theatre, literature, law, medicine, journalism and so on. These were modern Viennese citizens who while still mainly identifying as Jews, although some did convert to Christianity, adopted and absorbed the more sophisticated habits of the West such as the national language (German), behaviour, dress and culture. Having until this period been forced to live within the Pale, these successive generations celebrated their freedom by achieving hitherto unimaginable things. Glittering Jewish figures emerged in this period included the composers Gustav Mahler and Arnold Schönberg, the writers Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth (of whom we have already heard) and Karl Kraus, psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler as well as Jewish scientists who formed the majority of Austrian Nobel Prize winners.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna had 59 synagogues of various denominations, as well as a wide network of Jewish schools, and by 1923, the Viennese Jewish community was the third largest in Europe, and had reached the high point of its influence. However, as the Viennese Jewish community, rich and less rich, reached ever dizzying heights, the roots of its eventual destruction were already visible.

The great Austro-Hungarian Empire which had provided them with space to breathe and prosper came to an end in 1918 as a consequence of being on the losing side in World War I, and following the Treaty of Versailles, Vienna now became the rather oversized but

still lively capital of the small country of Austria (population six million). Antisemitism continued to exert its ugly attraction, in particular to a young Austrian corporal, Adolf Hitler, demobbed and unemployed at the end of the war. It was relatively easy for him and others to find a scapegoat for their nation's loss of power, prestige and empire: the discourse was familiar and the arguments ready-made - it was primarily the fault of the Jews. And so a terrible era for the world began to take shape, out of the ashes of empire and grandeur.

But let us return to Amalia and David and their formal wedding in 1899 in the central Viennese synagogue. There is no photograph of the wedding, but I imagine that it was more of a modern rather than traditional ceremony, with at least some guests in Western garb. It was likely a small wedding, as I imagine there had already been an outlay for the religious ceremony in Brody and the cost of train tickets for the extended Brody family to come to Vienna would have been prohibitive. Amalia's older brother Sigmund (born 1869) might have been at the ceremony, his photographs suggesting someone comfortable with travelling long distances across the Empire. Frieda, as we have already surmised, might have been there having accompanied her older sister on the long journey from Brody, and perhaps had agreed to live with the newly-weds whose first baby was already on the way, at least until she could find a job and/or husband for herself. It is doubtful that Amalia's parents could afford to attend, but perhaps the more prosperous Hirsch family on the bridegroom's side might have been better represented.

The young couple started their married life at number 4, apartment 3, Nestrogasse in Leopoldstadt, as we have seen, which is part of Vienna's second district. Together with Brigittenau in the 20th district, Leopoldstadt, named after the Emperor Leopold I who forcibly evicted the Jews in the seventeenth century, forms a large island surrounded by the Danube Canal with the Danube to the north. Nearby is the Wiener Prater, formerly imperial hunting grounds and for more than a century, a large amusement park, known as the Volksprater ('People's Prater'). At its entrance is the giant Ferris wheel opened in 1897 which featured prominently in the film *The Third Man*. Originally the site of the old ghetto, Jews settled in the area of Leopoldstadt due primarily to its proximity to the Nordbahnhof railway station, one of the main city entry-points used by migrants from different parts of the empire.

The high number of Jewish inhabitants pre-World War II, led to the area being known as Mazzesinsel ('Matzo Island') after Matzo, a type of unleavened bread eaten during the Jewish Passover festival. However Nestroygasse where the couple first lived was nearer to the smaller park of Augarten, home to the Vienna Boys' Choir and a porcelain factory ('Augarten-Porzellan').

The family Dinger continued to expand. After Gisela came Steffi born 19th January 1903, and then the only surviving boy Moritz, born 20th January 1905. He was followed by Elsa, born 23rd December 1906 and Tilda, born 13th February 1909. Then there was a gap until the last child, Trude, was born in 1917, towards the end of the Great War. The Jewish Records Office provides an explanation for this gap; two children were born between Tilda and Trude - Hedwig on 9th October 1910 and Karl on 14th January 1914, both of whom died in infancy. The family story was that there had been very little food during and immediately afterwards World War II and the family were close to starving. This was the reason why Trude, born in 1917, was of such short stature. There was a lack of food precisely at the time she most needed it for growth, and the same could be said for baby Karl who died at the age of 18 months in 1915. Amalia had nine children in all in just under 20 years, six of whom survived to adulthood. One can imagine during this period that she had little time to devote to anything or anyone else.

After the War ended, conditions clearly began to improve though we do not know how the family sustained itself in the next decade or so when the children were young. David Dinger was probably involved in some form of retail or business, while his wife and sister-in-law looked after the children. Certainly, photographs suggest that the family gradually became more prosperous and eventually enjoyed, for them, a good standard of living. It is likely that all the children had some kind of extended education beyond compulsory school. We know that Steffi, the second oldest child, and Trude, as the youngest attended secretarial college, which included learning foreign languages. Among Trude's belongings are certificates showing competence in spoken French and English. So it is likely that the other children did the same. In 1924, the family moved to the Krummbaumgasse address in a more prosperous part of district 2 and at around about the same time acquired (rented) a 'superior' shoe shop, which advertised 'luxury' shoes at the cheapest of prices (see the photograph of Frieda with the shop in the background below).

The two pictures below denote two contrasting aspects of the Amalia's family in Vienna. The picture of Sigmund, her older brother, is a studio portrait. He seems jaunty and prosperous and clearly a man about town. We know that he had his own business but not what it dealt in⁸. Perhaps he was a businessman or commercial traveller plying his trade across the empire. The picture of Frieda is more of a family snap taken outside the family shoe shop. She appears less concerned about clothes and appearance. As an unmarried woman living with the family, we can imagine she was more limited to the private and domestic sphere, given her major involvement in helping to bring up the family and organise the household.

Sigmund Dinger & Frieda Moszkowicz/Dinger



So public and private, business and domesticity were part and parcel of what it meant to be a modern family in Vienna in the 1920s – gendered certainly as far as the older generation was concerned, but less so perhaps for their children.

This period was perhaps the highpoint of Amalia's life. She and her husband had successfully integrated into (Jewish) Viennese life, they had a flourishing shoe-selling business and their children were growing up strong, confident and well-educated. Disaster struck in 1928 when David suddenly died probably of a heart attack. However, eventually Amalia took over the lease of the flat, and possibly the shop too, and life went on. The older

⁸ This information was gain from a newspaper announcement of his funeral in 1921 where he is described as a 'Zuhaberd der Firma S. Dinger'

children by now would have been working. Steffi, for example, was employed from 1928 in various local businesses as a clerk and later as administrator, Elsa was a shop assistant, and Trude, the youngest child when she was old enough, became like Steffi a clerk. The remaining sisters in all probability did the same, while their brother Moritz may have gone into commerce of some sort perhaps with an extended family member, or perhaps also into clerical or retail work. In family photographs he appears 'white-collared' and well dressed, though since there was no family story of him as either entrepreneurial or ne'er-do-well, it is likely that he had a modest job which enabled him to contribute to the family income.

**Steffi, Uncle Sigmund (Dinger) & Gisela
app. 1918**



Moritz, Trude & Steffi in 1927



Amalia we must assume spent most of the 1920s and 1930s at her home in the 2nd district, looking after her large family and helping out in the shoe-shop, aided by Frieda. However, for her children, Vienna was a potential cultural and artistic playground. The 1920s was a vibrant decade in the city, particularly for the young. The new post-War Austrian social democratic government was instituting major and internationally-acclaimed reforms in housing and social policy, which extended well into the 1930s. The coffee houses, the cinemas, theatres and opera: all were available to the young Dingers with a little money in their pockets. Certainly my mother, Steffi, retained a great love of German literature and of the theatre and cinema (the actress Greta Garbo was a big heroine of hers) until the day she died, and going out for coffee and cake at the weekend was one of the regular treats of my childhood. Travel was also available, mainly by railway, and Steffi took trips to Budapest, Rotterdam and Amsterdam as can be seen from her photograph albums and the hotel labels

pressed into her autograph book. Amalia must have been so proud to see her modern, Viennese family prospering in the new, modern Austria.

As the historian Eric Hobsbawm says in describing his own life in the 1920s in Vienna: ‘for Jews to be ‘German’ was not a political or national but a cultural project’. It meant creating a distance between ‘the backwardness of the shtetls and shuls [synagogues and prayer houses]’ and joining the modern world. They wanted to speak German rather than Yiddish because they aspired to be German rather than their more religious Eastern cousins; that is, ‘the Hasidim with their miracle-working hereditary *wunderrabbis* or the *yeshiva-bokhers* explicating the Talmud in Yiddish’⁹. Like Hobsbawm’s relatives, the Dinger family had no idea about the dangers that threatened the Jews. They were of course aware of anti-Semitism and indeed the Christian-Social Party in the 1920s remained as anti-Semitic as its founder, the celebrated Viennese mayor Karl Lueger (1844-1910). However, they must have been shocked when news came of the 1930 German Reichstag election in which Hitler’s National Socialists became the second largest party and horrified when they took control in 1933. In these circumstances, it was impossible for the Dinger family to forget that they were Jews, however emancipated and modern.

Hobsbawm claims that the different generations of Jews were divided about how to deal with this situation and the rising threat of state-sponsored anti-Semitism to their emancipated status. The older generation advocated keeping a low profile, staying on the right side of the authorities that could protect them, and taking evasive action where necessary – presumably this was Amalia’s stance as she approached her sixties. Her children, however, were more defiant, and active in the Social Democratic Party, calling for resistance and an end to prejudice and injustice. Neither generation anticipated that the political goal of Nazism was to become their annihilation. Otherwise they may have acted earlier to get out.

As a child growing up in Vienna in the 1920s, Hobsbawm recalls that he did not experience anti-Semitism personally and, brought up in a non-religious household, felt entirely remote from traditional forms of Judaism on which so much prejudice was based. As far as I can recall from my mother, this was the same for the Dinger children. They were

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm (2002) *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life*, London: Penguin, Allen Lane, p22

proud to be citizens of Austria and residents of Vienna. Yet, however modern and progressive they aspired to be, it was important to acknowledge their Jewish identity. Indeed, Hobsbawm remembers his mother telling him very firmly that he must never do anything or seem to do anything that might suggest that he was ashamed of being a Jew.¹⁰ So, heightened anti-Semitism brought with it fear and apprehension but also greater ethnic awareness and solidarity.

The end of the 1920s and early 1930s were marked by increasing political conflict between Left and Right in Austria, against a backdrop of prolonged social and economic crisis. The Social Democrats eventually lost power in 1934 and the Christian Social Chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, authoritarian in character, suspended parliament in 1933, around the same time that the Nazis took power in Germany. This was followed by several days of civil war in which the government was victorious and which led to the outlawing of the Social Democratic opposition which formed the main resistance to the Nazis. There were also increasingly violent attacks on Jews and others, emanating from Germany. Dollfuss himself was murdered in 1934 in a failed Nazi-inspired attempt to overthrow the government. His successor Kurt Schuschnigg attempted to find a compromise with Hitler without loss of Austria's sovereignty but failed, and was replaced by the pro-Nazi Guido Schmidt, a close friend of Herman Goering. The unopposed entry of the German army on 12 March 1938, known as the *Anschluss*, marked the definitive end of the Austrian 'mini-state'.¹¹ Not a shot was fired. Welcomed by 'hysterically cheering crowds'¹², Hitler speedily took the decision to incorporate Austria as a whole into the Third Reich; in effect making it just another German province. This was the last visit that Hitler was ever to make to Austria, the country of his birth.

The *Anschluss* had disastrous consequences for the Jewish community regardless of whether they were rich or poor, orthodox or secular, Yiddish- or German-speaking, westernised or from the East. Immediately, the new Austrian regime sought to impose similar laws and restrictions to those in the Fatherland (known as the Nuremberg Laws).

¹⁰ Hobsbawm, p24

¹¹ Oliver Rathkolb, (2009) *The Anschluss in the Rear-View Mirror; 1938-2008: Historical Memories between Debate and Transformation*. In: Eds. Günter Bischof, Fritz Plasser and Barbara Stelzl-Marx *New Perspectives on Austrians and World War II*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers (5-28), p11

¹² Rathkolb, p11

Tens of thousands of men and women, primarily political opponents and Jews, were arrested and the first deportations to Dachau took place within a month. A rigged plebiscite (or referendum) in April resulted in a near hundred percent support for the incorporation of Austria into Germany – Jews by then had been stripped of all their citizen's rights and not allowed to vote. The persecution of Jews and anyone who dared to express opposition to the Nazi regime also started immediately. Rathkolb argues that due to an 'Anschluss from the inside' the Nuremberg Laws were more effective in Austria than in Germany. Austrian Nazis and their followers complemented the invasion by seizing power from inside the country and rushed, first to humiliate the Jews and then to persecute them 'in the most brutal, bestialized manner'.¹³ One remembered story from my mother was how Jews, when outside, were forced to get down on their knees and scrub the pavements.

While to be sure the Dinger family cannot have been aware of the eventual terrible outcome of Nazi persecution of the Jews, this was the time – after the *Anschluss* - when plans were set in place to escape. They were more fortunate than others in the sense that while not wealthy, they had a little money put away, were living in the capital, and had relatives abroad that could vouch for them. They were thus in a position to manage the bureaucracy of visas, passports and other documentation necessary to getting out. For example, an emigration questionnaire signed by Gisela Dinger and dated 15th May 1938, requests permission to leave Austria together with her mother, Malke Dinger and her aunt Frieda Moszkowicz¹⁴. Though the questionnaire indicates that London is the preferred destination, other alternatives include North America and Australia. The address given in London is that to which three of the sisters eventually escaped, so we must suppose that the rest of the family filled out similar questionnaires at about this time. We also know that Steffi's visa application was dated as late as July 1938¹⁵ and also that all three sisters who eventually escaped to London had new passports issued in October 1938¹⁶. So there was a rush to escape, but sadly, only four of the children managed it and neither of the older generation. Steffi, Elsa and Trude travelled individually at different times to London, and a belated escape was made in 1941 by Tilda and her son (Amalia's grandson) George,

¹³ Rathkolb, p12

¹⁴ Supplied by the Archive of the Jewish Community in Vienna, 27-01-2012

¹⁵ From the records of the German Jewish Aid Committee (GJAC) based in London

¹⁶ The date stamped on their passports

eastwards to the USA, via Shanghai, to join relatives of Tilda's husband, Max Bertish, who was trapped in Switzerland. Those left in Vienna were Gisela, Amalia's oldest daughter who died of ovarian cancer in 1940, and Moritz, Amalia's only son. He was among the German and Austrian Jews who fled to the Baltic States and were there picked up by the Soviet army when it invaded in 1939 and transported eastwards, in Moritz's case to a slave work camp, Karaganda, now in Kazakhstan. Some died and others survived to return. Ironically, at the end of the war when the Russians entered Germany, they deported large numbers of German men and women to the same place previously occupied by Jews.

Karaganda (Karltag) was one of the biggest of fifty or so corrective labour camps established in the Soviet Union and by 1939 was incarcerating around 1.3 million prisoners¹⁷. Unlike other Soviet labour camps which concentrated on mining or construction, Karltag was an agricultural camp. Established in September 1931 during Stalin's collectivisation period, the aim was to turn the barren steppe into fertile fields for crops and grazing. To this end, sub-camps were spread across a great distance. Writing about her experience of imprisonment in Karltag between 1939 and 1941, Margaret Buber-Neumann¹⁸ says she failed to gain a clear sense of the size of the camp; the main area, she believed, was substantially bigger than one of the smaller European countries such as Denmark or the Netherlands. She describes the appalling conditions of filth, hunger and rampant disease which prisoners faced, and the shortages of everything. Although death rates were high during Buber-Neumann's stay, they increased substantially after the Soviet Union declared war on Nazi Germany from 1941 onwards and it was during this time that Moritz would have been in the camp. Evidence from a list of Jewish inmates released after the war suggests that he survived until 1945 which indicates that he had initial resources of strength, astuteness and courage¹⁹. However he did not survive to be released as the war ended. It was a sad end for the only boy of the family. However what happened to his mother, Amalia and his aunt Frieda, perhaps, is the saddest of all.

¹⁷ Wachsmann, Nikolaus, 'Introduction', vii-xxii. In Buber-Neumann, Margaret Under Two Dictators: prisoner of Stalin and Hitler (1st edition Gollancz, 1949) revised publication with introduction by N. Wachsmann, Pimlico, 2008.

¹⁸ Buber-Neumann, Margaret, Op cit.

¹⁹ Taken from a list of names of 190 Jews who died at the Karaganda camp, or who returned from there in 1946-47, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) [RG 14.053M. reel 10]. The lists were provided by the London office of the World Jewish Congress.

http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Holocaust/0209_Karaganda_lists.html#Search (accessed 06-05-2012)

It must have been such a relief for Amalia to know that three of her daughters were safe, at least for the moment, in London, though a worry that two daughters and a son were still in Vienna. She would probably have encouraged Moritz to flee Vienna and take his chances to escape the Nazi regime. Amalia must have been distraught by the death, in 1940 of her eldest daughter at the age of only 38; as were her then London-based sisters when they received the news with shrieks and tears, according to a young member of the London branch of the family. Amalia must have been anxious and eventually relieved when her daughter Tilda and grandson George set out in 1941 on the dangerous eastward journey – the western routes were by now blocked by war. George who is still alive and living in Florida, remembers that he and his mother caught the last train out of Vienna though this may well be apocryphal, and as a five-year old, helping his mother to negotiate Shanghai and the rest of the journey east. So by 1941, all Amalia's children and her only grandchild had gone. Amalia and Frieda were left alone with little income, as it must be assumed that the shoe shop had been expropriated due to the so-called Arianization of Jewish property. Fortunately they had sufficient money to pay the rent on the Krummbaumgasse flat. In 1938, there were 206,000 Jews living in Vienna, ten percent of the Viennese population. Of those, 130,000 left the country, 65,000 died on concentration camps and fewer than 2,000 survived.²⁰ Very few returned to Vienna after the war.

Part 3: The End - Lodz, Theresenstadt and Treblinka

So, how did the route to mass murder develop? Until 1941, the Nazis were mostly interested in encouraging Jews to emigrate, forcing them however to leave behind all but their most essential possessions, and of course their property. However, many countries refused to accept Jewish refugees and those that did, operated a quota system that placed considerable limitations on the number that could be admitted. Following this, various plans were discussed by the Nazi leaders aimed at 'settling' the Jews that remained in what was then Greater Germany, in other parts of the world such as on the island of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. The aim was that Germany and its conquered territories should be made

²⁰ Inger Bauer-Manhart. (2010) *Jewish Vienna – Heritage and Mission*. Vienna: Vienna City Administration

Jew-free. To this end, Jews were initially deported to 'transit' camps and ghettos in the East, as slave labour for the Nazi war machine.

However the murder of Jews began in earnest in mid-1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, when SS and police mobile killing units began massive killing operations aimed at eliminating entire Jewish communities in the occupied countries. By autumn 1941, mobile gas vans had been introduced. These were panelled trucks with exhaust pipes reconfigured to pump poisonous carbon monoxide gas into sealed spaces, killing all those locked within and designed to complement ongoing shooting operations.

Four weeks after the beginning of the Soviet invasion and as the Germans advanced westwards, Hitler allocated responsibility for security to SS chief Heinrich Himmler which included elimination of any perceived threats to permanent German rule. Following this, Hermann Goering (Hitler's deputy) authorized General Reinhard Heydrich to make preparations for the implementation of a 'complete solution of the Jewish question', code-named *Aktion Reinhard*.

Heydrich convened the notorious Wannsee Conference in January 1942 to inform and secure support from German government ministries and other agencies which would be implicated in the implementation of the mass murder of the Jews. Legitimation came with news that Hitler himself had approved the operation. Thus the aim of the conference was not to debate whether such a plan should be undertaken, but to discuss how it was to be carried out.

Aktion Reinhard was carried out in the utmost secrecy and every effort was made not to alert the populace to its overall aim. The first stage was deportation and typically, deportees were informed that they were being sent away to work. They were instructed to bring with them some clothing, blankets, shoes, eating utensils (but no knife), a bowl, and some money, and when rounded up, were put into trucks or forced to walk to a nearby railway station. The trains were often strategically located at a distance from the usual passenger terminals, and out of the eye of the local populace. Initially, and this was the case in the Vienna deportations, deportees travelled in ordinary passenger trains. Later, cattle trucks were used and conditions were far more brutal.

We, of succeeding post-war generations, have perhaps become impervious to such stories of deportation, horror and murder. However, when applied to people that we have

come to know, the stories take on a more personal and intimate nature and it is easier to see their impact on humanity. We begin to appreciate what it must have felt like to people like ourselves, to people like Amalia and Frieda. The bare facts we know concerning their fate, taken from the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum's website, are as follows:

Frieda Beila Dinger (maiden name: Moskovicz)

- born 08-07-1877
- wartime address: Wien 2, Krummbaumgasse 2/12
- details of transport: Transport from Vienna to Litzmannstadt (Lodz) , and to Lodz Ghetto on 02-11-1941, address, Rembrandtstrasse, 4 Flat 19
- Prison number on Transport: 277

Victim's status Perished

Malke Dinger

- born 04-11-1873 in Brody
- wartime address: Wien 2, Krummbaumgasse 2/12
- 1st transport: No. 34 from Vienna to Theresienstadt Ghetto, Czechoslovakia , 29-07-1942, prison no. 6-942
- 2nd deportation to Treblinka Camp, Poland, 26-09-1942

Victim's status Perished

Frieda

Frieda we can see was deported first, on 2nd November 1941, one of 998 deportees to Lodz²¹. We cannot know exactly what happened to her but existing testimony from survivors gives us a good idea²². She would have been selected on the basis of a priority list. If it was alphabetical, Dinger would be one of the first to go, but perhaps not here, as her older sister Amalia was clearly not listed. Frieda would have been asked to report to a local holding centre, probably the local school, where there might be mattresses and food provided by the Jewish community. She would usually have to wait some hours, although for a few it could take days and weeks, before she was allocated by the officer in charge, to , for example, Riga, Terezin or in her case, Lodz. She would have been put on a huge truck to Aspenbahnhof, the station serving trains to the East. As already noted, testimony suggests

²¹ <http://www.deathcamps.org/reinhard/austriatransports.htm>

²² See for example, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atNum02TPsc>

that Viennese Jews travelled in ordinary trains, rather than as later, in cattle trucks, and often received food for the journey prepared beforehand by the local Jewish community. Lodz (known also by its German name Litzmannstad) lies north of the Austrian border in what is now the Czech Republic. The journey would not have been too long – perhaps a few hours. Security would have been tight but generally the journey might not have been too uncomfortable. Frieda would have been only allowed to take with her basic possessions as we have seen, although she may have sewn small pieces of jewellery in her coat lining or hidden money in her clothing, as others did. After all, she did not know when and if she would return. She was allowed one suitcase and characteristically told that she was being sent away to work. At this time, she would have had no idea what was to come. She may have hoped that in the work camp she would avoid the routine persecution that faced her every day in Vienna. She may even have volunteered to go, which would explain her earlier departure.

What was this Lodz ghetto, from which Frieda never emerged? Few survived so we cannot know her precise experience, but as soon as she arrived at the station she would have been aware that she had been duped. Rather than the formally polite officers she was used to dealing with in Vienna, she would be confronted by noise, and by officers, guards and barking dogs. Radogoszcz (Radegast) Station was the main entry point for the Lodz ghetto. Similar to the various transports of Jews and Gypsies in 1941 from outside Poland and later, the waves of Jewish communities brought in from the liquidated ghettos of towns and villages in the surrounding region, she would have been processed, her name checked and her belongings searched and any discovered jewellery and other precious possessions confiscated. Then she would have been led to a holding bay (old school building or the like) before being allocated to an already crowded ghetto apartment. We can see from the record that she lived (and probably died) in Flat 9, 4, Rembrandtstrasse (previous name Sw. Jakuba Street). From October 1941 onwards, it was the allocated housing area for Jews from Austria and Czechoslovakia, predominantly from Vienna and Prague. It was also where a central soup kitchen was located. In mid-May 1942, the ghetto's Tailoring Department and Central Depot for Raw Materials were also located there. So Frieda might have been put to work as a tailor at No. 8 Rembrandtstrasse, not far from where she lived.

The Lodz ghetto was primarily designed for the persecution and elimination of the Jews but it was also an economic unit for the war machine. Inmates had no legal protection or proper food, and had to endure appalling living conditions. The establishment of a ghetto in Lodz began in April 1940, following the Nazi invasion of Poland. The most neglected part of town with the poorest living conditions was selected for the site, already the home of around 62,000 Jews. Non-Jews were forced to leave and 100,000 Jews living in other parts of the city and its suburbs were forced in. This was followed by a wholesale seizure of Jewish-owned properties, furnished apartments and works of art. Some two weeks after this forced movement of people, the ghetto was sealed, enclosed with barbed wire and a police guard installed. Jews were forbidden to leave and anyone who entered or left the ghetto without permission or who was caught smuggling was summarily shot. The same fate awaited anyone who approached the perimeter fence without permission.

The organisation of the Lodz ghetto with its German-led administration (Ghettoverwaltung), various policing organisations (Gestapo, Kripo, Schupo²³) and so-called Jewish self-government (town Elders, here lead by Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski) became a prototype for other ghettos and camps. The role of Rumkowski and others like him in other places was to ensure that Jewish inmates obeyed the rigid and brutal regime of the ghetto, but also to allocate work, distribute food and have responsibility for welfare. Rumkowski was responsible for the internal organisational structure of the ghetto which was policed by Jewish security guards. He liaised directly with the chief of police. Those working for Rumkowski were rewarded with a larger food ration and temporary protection from deportation; so competition to join his administration was fierce. The main area of work was the production of uniforms for the German army, and invariably if an individual could not work, she or he would receive little or no food with certain death to follow. The role played by Rumkowski was particularly conflicted by the fact that he was personally entrusted to make the decisions on who was to be deported to death camps such as Chelmo. For example, in September 1942 the Germans demanded 20,000 deportees, and this time it was the elderly and the children, the least economically productive, that were to be given up.

²³ The Gestapo provided political supervision of the ghetto, Kripo the criminal police, conducted the pillage of Jewish property and Schupo guarded the ghetto borders, and kept peace and order within them. (ref: Julian Baranowski (2009) *Litzmannstadt Ghetto 1940-1944*. In: Andrzej Machejek (ed.) *Jews of Lodz*. Lodz, Poland: Wydawnictwo Hamal Andrzej Machejek), 85-1001

Rumkowski made a notorious speech on the day of the selection which pleaded for understanding about his situation.

A grievous blow has struck the ghetto. They are asking us to give up the best we possess – the children and the elderly.....I must stretch out my hand and beg: Brothers and sisters, hand them over to me! Fathers and mothers, give me your children.²⁴

Rumkowski said that if the decision was not taken by him and the ghetto inmates, the Germans themselves would forcibly and brutally carry out the selection. He declared that he had always worked for peace 'but something else, it turns out, was destined for us'. Some critics have judged him a major collaborator, responsible for a demoralised and ultimately deadly work camp, and for easing the process of selection and deportation to the death camps. Others have seen him as a pragmatist who did the best he could to save lives and alleviate suffering, and as a martyr who ultimately suffered the same fate as everyone else. Following the liquidation of the ghetto in 1944, Rumkowski and what was left of his family were transported to, and then murdered at Auschwitz.

About a third of the Lodz ghetto population died due to their terrible living conditions (starvation, lack of drainage and hygiene, cold weather etc.). The remainder were murdered, mainly gassed. There were four main deportation periods: December 1941 when 20,000 Jews were murdered at the Chelmno death camp; January to September 1942 when 70,000 were gassed, including the elderly and children as we have seen; June and July 1944, when 7,000 Jews perished; and from August 1944 onwards, following the liquidation of the ghetto, when 60,000 Jews were transported and murdered, this time in Auschwitz. A clear-up squad of about 750 was left behind, and they and 30 children and 80 adults who had hidden away, were eventually liberated by the Soviet army on 19th January 1945. The killing machine had been in operation right up to the end. Rumkowski as we have seen died in Auschwitz. Eventually some retribution was exacted. Hans Biebow, the ghetto director for its entire duration, was tried, found guilty of crimes against humanity and executed in Lodz in April 1947.

²⁴ 'Give me your children!'. Chaim Rumkowski's speech, Lodz, 4 September 1942. In Henryk Ross, Thomas Weber, Martin Parr and Timothy Prus (2005) *Lodz Ghetto Album*. Chris Boot: archive of modern conflict, 148-9

As for Frieda, she was among the nearly 5000 inmates from Vienna, only 34 of who were still alive when Lodz ghetto and other camps were liberated.²⁵ Survivors tended to be young people whose bodies and minds were able to withstand the crippling conditions that confronted them. Frieda was 67 when she arrived and however fit, her age would have limited the kind of work she could do. She may have worked for a short time perhaps in tailoring, as already suggested, but if/when she could not keep up, starvation was the inevitable outcome since, as far as we know, she had no relatives or friends to fend for her. Since she is not listed in the deportations, she must have been among the third of the ghetto population who died within the ghetto— of starvation, disease, German brutality, despair and/or all of these.

Amalia

Amalia's experience was similar to her younger sister with regard to her deportation, this time to Theresienstadt (also known as Terezin). Her departure was scheduled for 29th July 1942, about eight months after her sister had left. Like Frieda, she would have been informed that she was being deported, and asked to present herself at the local meeting point for collection. She would have been able to take few possessions and would also have been required to turn in the key of her flat, so that non-Jews might move in. We can see from the record that another woman from the same building, Tini Steiner, born 1862 and therefore aged 80 at the time, left on the same transport; so perhaps Amalia helped her older neighbour to gather her possessions together and present herself to the authorities. Or she may have travelled with others from the house since altogether 28 Jews from 2 Krummbaumgasse were deported and perished. Like Frieda before her, Amalia was unlikely to know the precise situation into which she was being forced, although by now, some months after the transports began, she would no doubt be resigned to the probability of further horrors to come. The distance between Vienna and Theresienstadt is around 400 kilometres which according to survivors, took about 24 hours. Again, conditions on the train were not too bad by all accounts, even for the elderly, and so the true horror of her situation would not have been revealed until the train reached its destination, Bauschowitz

²⁵ See: <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/lodz/statistics.htm#Western>

station, several kilometres outside the ghetto. Deportees were typically force-marched to the ghetto although the elderly and infirm were transported in trucks, so this might have been the case for Tini if not for Amalia. The first impression Amalia would gain of Theresienstadt would be of a high brick wall topped with grass and surrounded by a moat. Deportees were generally marched through a gate in the wall to an area where they were searched for hidden, 'illegal' possessions and then sent to an ex-military barracks to wait in ever more crowded conditions until allocated a place to stay. Amalia was in Theresienstadt for a little less than two months; yet she would have had time to get to know the organisation of the camp and gain a sense of where her future might lie.

Originally a garrison town founded in 1780 by Emperor Joseph II in honour of his mother, the Empress Maria Theresa, Theresienstadt was converted into a ghetto with the arrival of the first Jewish deportees on 24th November 1941. The ghetto was used to house mainly elderly Jews who could not be sent as forced labour to the main work camps in the East. Included among its Jewish inmates were 'invalids, those over sixty-five, decorated and disabled war veterans, those in mixed marriages and their children, and prominent Jews.... who had connections'²⁶. Alongside instructions about *Aktion Reinhardt*, Heydrich announced at the Wannsee conference in January 1942 that Theresienstadt was to be a special Jewish ghetto, a showcase to the world of German's benign treatment of the Jews, and indeed, the Red Cross was notoriously duped on a visit in June 1944. Previously, all Jews were sent to Poland or Russia, as in the case of Frieda. But, later in 1942 Theresienstadt was re-imagined as a more 'privileged' ghetto for the 'deserving'. However it never lost its original purpose - as a transit camp for Jews to the East. Even if its mortality rate was lower than the worst of the camps and ghettos, statistics from the camp reveal an appalling picture. Of the 140,000 who entered the walled town between its establishment in November 1941 and March 1945 when it was liberated, almost 90,000 were sent to their deaths in Auschwitz, Treblinka and other killing factories, 33,000 died mostly from hunger and disease in the ghetto itself, mainly children and the elderly; and only 16, 832 survivors, many of whom had entered the camp later in the war when conditions had begun to improve (in preparation for the Red Cross visit in 1944) and when deportations had all but

²⁶ Troller, Norbert (1991) Introduction. *Theresienstadt: Hitler's Gift to the Jews*. University of North Carolina Press, xxi.

ceased. The first commandant of the ghetto, Siegfried Seidl was a sadistic man who orchestrated frequent beatings of inmates and ordered the only executions carried out within the ghetto in 1942. Seidl was replaced in June 1943 on the orders of Adolf Eichmann, because he was felt to be out of tune with the new image of Theresienstadt. Seidl's successor, Anton Burger, administered the ghetto until a month before the Russians arrived. The organisation of Theresienstadt was similar to that of Lodz, with Jewish Elders acting as leaders of the Jewish ghetto community. Under Burger's rule there were three Jewish leaders: Jakob Edelstein who was deported East with 5000 of his fellow Czechs in December 1943; Paul Eppstein who was murdered by the Nazis in September 1944 on the eve of the last wave of deportations to Auschwitz; and for the last few months, Benjamin Murelstein with the renowned Leo Baeck as his deputy. Both survived the war. Under Burger's supposedly more benign rule, however, 200-300 people died in a single night (11th November 1943) when the camp's entire population of 40,000 was forced to stand outside in the freezing cold all night for a 'census count'. As in Lodz, the number of people transported eastwards was dictated by the Nazi overlords but the burden of selection was placed on the Jews themselves. As Norber Troller a Theresienstadt survivor laments:

In the end this unbearable, desperate, cynical burden destroyed the community leaders who were forced to make the selections. The power over life and death forced on the Council of Elders was the main reason, the unavoidable force, behind the ever-increasing corruption in the ghetto; its single, solitary goal was life and 'protection' from transports²⁷

As the population of the ghetto increased, transports from Theresienstadt eastwards began: the first on 11th March 1942 were to Lublin, a forced work camp in Poland, and then onwards to instant death at Belzec and Sobibor. The first transport to Treblinka, about 50 miles northeast of Warsaw, took place on 19th September 1942. Tini was on the second on 21st September and Amalia was on the fourth transport on 26th September. These were mainly transports of the elderly although younger Jews were also sometimes included. Hershl Sperling was only 15 when he was packed on to the same train as Amalia to Treblinka. The Gestapo had discovered Hershl and his family hiding in a bunker in

²⁷ Troller, xxxii

Czestochowa only hours previously. Hershl wrote of the terrible thirst of the freight car, of the desperate souls crammed in like cattle, and the sweet odour of death that hovered over Treblinka as the train pulled towards its destination.²⁸ There were 2004 persons crushed on to that train, with the bodies of those who died en route left in the carriage, so that the number on arrival would match that of those who had departed. There has been much written about Treblinka which I do not want to include here: terrible details about how and where the trains were stopped, the extreme secrecy of the operation, the heartbreaking cries for help and water from the entrapped Jews to the local peasants, the enforced shearing of hair and stripping of clothes before being harried, whipped and rushed into the gas chambers – all achieved in only a couple of hours. The only people who survived Treblinka were the Nazi instigators, their Ukrainian collaborators and usually for just a few hours, the men selected to dispose of the bodies after each transport.

The commandant of Treblinka for most of its existence, Franz Stangl, was formerly an Austrian policeman and non-Nazi, who through conditioning, coercion and ambition, became involved in the German euthanasia programme before becoming commandant of the Sobibor death camp and then Treblinka. Having escaped at the end of the war eventually to Brazil, he was tracked down by Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal and arrested by local Brazilian police on 28th February 1967. He was condemned to life imprisonment in 1970 but died only six months into his sentence.

Interviewed by the journalist Gitta Sereny in 1971 some weeks before his death, Stangl expressed remorse about what had happened and explained that the only way he could tolerate what he had been asked to do was to disassociate himself mentally from the camp's principal activity. His main tasks, he said, were to handle administration and paperwork, and ensure efficiency and the minimisation of camp corruption. As reported by Sereny, 'work' was described as follows:

Of course, as I said, usually I'd be working in my office: there was a great deal of paperwork – till about eleven. Then I made my next round [he made the first at 5am] starting on top of the *Totenlager* [disposal of dead bodies]. By that time they were well ahead with the work up there.

²⁸ Smith, Mark (2010) *Treblinka Survivor: The Life and Death of Hershl Sperling*. Stroud, England: The History Press

Sereny explained:

What he meant was that by this time the 5,000 people who had arrived that morning were dead: the 'work' he referred to was the disposal of the bodies, which took most of the rest of the day. I[Sereny] knew this but I wanted to get him to speak more directly about the *people* and asked where the people were who had come on the transport. But his answer was evasive: he still avoided referring to them as people.

Later, Sereny pursued Stangl's ability to dehumanise the victims of the process for which he was responsible, by avoiding meeting them where possible, and by viewing them primarily as 'cargo'. He replied:

I think it started the day I first saw the *Totenlager* in Treblinka. I remember Wirth [leading *Aktion Rheinhardt* protagonist] standing there, next to these pits full of blue black corpses. It had nothing to do with humanity – it couldn't have: it was a mass – a mass of rotting flesh. Wirth said 'What shall we do with this garbage.' I think unconsciously that started me thinking of them as cargo.²⁹

For Amalia, a small part of Stangl's 'cargo', Treblinka marked the end of her life and her suffering. She may have died on the journey to the camp due to her weakened state after two months' incarceration in Theresienstadt, or she may have survived to meet her fate in the gas chambers. She was 69.

Who was left to mourn her passing? It was not until her daughters in London made a request to the UK Search Bureau based in Bloomsbury that anyone was notified of Amalia's death. Below is the short, devastating note that they received as late as 1947, nearly five years after their mother died.

²⁹ Sereny, Gitta (2000) Colloquy with a Conscience. *The German Trauma: experiences and reflections 1938-2000*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin

Red Cross response to enquiry about Amalia



Presumably, given the news that had come out of the camps, Steffi, Elsa, Trude and eventually Tilda in America would not have been surprised to hear confirmation of the fate of their mother, though thankfully for them, the absolute horror of the camps and ghettos would not be revealed for some years. Amalia was also mourned by the world as one of the six million Jews killed only because of their Jewish heritage.

And we mourn her also now, some 70 years after her death: we, her grandchildren, who never knew her personally but met her through our mothers' stories and their capacity to love. The hope is that this act of writing will go some way to avenging her fate; another has been to create a more public memorial to Amalia and Frieda and others like them. Through a recent project to mark the 'many sites that were once of importance to Jewish life in Leopoldstadt, thereby revealing the history of the expulsion and murder of the Jewish population'³⁰, we have been able to dedicate a memorial stone to Amalia and Frieda in front of their Krummbaumgasse home and thereby rescue them from public anonymity. And probably that is all we can do.

³⁰ Elisabeth Ben David-Hindler. *The Path of Remembrance through Leopoldstadt (Vienna's 2nd district)*, Trans Thomas Kellerberger. Vienna: The Stones of Remembrance Society, 2007

Commemoration stone: Malke and Frieda Dinger

