

Hadasa Olszaniecka

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Hadasa's widowed mother supported her when she decided to go to Italy, after high school, and attend university: she wanted to become a physician. She graduated in July of 1938, but two months later the racial laws prevented her from working and living in the peninsula because she was a foreign-born Jew. So she returned to her family in Łódź, Poland. She managed to survive prison in the ghetto and deportation only until the summer of 1944.

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Student in Italy

Hadasa was born in Illintsi (which was part of the Russian Empire, then the Soviet Union, and today Ukraine) on 30 September 1911, to Jankiel Olszaniecki and Lea Bernstein¹.

It is not clear when the family emigrated to Łódź, probably during the war; the mother, who was widowed when Hadasa was still little, would become a merchant there². The city, which became one of the principle industrial centers of Tsarist Russia and – since 1918 – one of the most important centers of independent Poland, was characterized by a complex multicultural tradition: in 1931 the Jewish population consisted of about 192,000 people (32%), while by 1939 it had increased to about 200,000 inhabitants, in the context of rapid demographic growth in its urban area³.

¹ ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Olszaniecka Hadasa», enrollment file at the University of Florence, 21 January 1935.

² The database *Lodz Registration Cards 1916-1921 PSA*, accessible at <https://www.jewishgen.org> (accessed upon registration 10 December 2021) includes the census registration file of a family of Jewish faith, composed by Łaja Olszaniecka (1879), a widowed cook, and by Rachela (1899), Ida (1896), a teacher, Lajb (1904), Blima (1908) and Adasia [sic] (1911), all coming from Illintsi. The file is not dated, but from a note one can infer that it dates to before February 1918. The business activity of her mother is declared by Hadasa in ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Olszaniecka Hadasa», enrollment file, cit.

³ Julian K. Janczak, *The National Structure of the Population in Łódź in the Years 1820-1939*, «Polin», 6, 1991, pp. 25-26, cited in Gordon J. Horwitz, *Ghettostadt. Łódź and the Making of a Nazi City*, Cambridge (MA) - London, Belknap Press, 2008, pp. 3, 326. For the historical context see Robert Blobaum, *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland*, Ithaca, Cornell University

From 1921 Hadasa attended the local Jewish female high school named after Romana Konopczyńska-Sobolewska, and passed the exit examination in May 1930. At that date the young woman had Polish citizenship⁴.

She attended the School of Medicine at Charles University in Prague from the academic year 1930-31 to the winter term of the academic year 1933-34⁵. She emigrated to Italy presumably in March 1934 and enrolled at the School of Medicine and Surgery of the University of Padua; a few months later, in January 1935, she applied to transfer to Florence for her fourth year of courses. Given the differences between the Czechoslovakian and Italian educational systems, Hadasa had to take almost all of the exams required for the degree, which she successfully completed with a thesis in stomatology and the score 84/110 on 12 July 1938⁶. In any case, many young foreigners had irregular paths of study, given their need to overcome the linguistic barrier and the economic difficulties to which their families were subjected. Families often made great efforts to send their children abroad, pulling them away from the hostile environment of the Polish universities.

In the occupied city: from the prison in the ghetto to deportation

We then lose track of Hadasa. She decided to return to Poland, probably because the start of the anti-Semitic campaign rendered any career prospect in Italy unrealistic; the decree-law 1728 of 17 November 1938 would also mandate the expulsion of foreign-born Jews from the peninsula by March 1939, with the exception of those students who were not lagging behind in

Press, 2005; Szymon Rudnicki, *Jews in Poland Between the Two World Wars*, «Shofar. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies», 29, 3, 2011, pp. 4-23; Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland 1919-1939*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter Mouton, 2011 (1st ed. 1983).

⁴ ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Olszaniecka Hadasa», certified translation of the high school diploma, 20 January 1934.

⁵ Ibid., certified translation of the «Index magistrorum et scholarum» issued by Univerzita Karlova [Charles University], 14 February 1934.

⁶ Ibid., attestation of the rector of the University of Padua, 31 December 1934; enrollment form at the University of Florence, 21 January 1935; transcript and degree certificate from the University of Florence, 12 July 1938.

their university program⁷.

In Łódź, which was in the Polish territories directly annexed to the Reich, the Nazis immediately proceeded with the creation of the ghetto, which concluded in April 1940; at the end of the war, only a few thousand people would survive the daily prohibitive conditions, forced labor and deportation⁸. Hadasa too was imprisoned in the ghetto: her last known residences are dwelling 11 at Hanseaten Strasse 23 and later, Matrosen Gasse 1, where she appears to have moved on 17 September 1942; previously she had lived with her mother Lea, with Halina (1929) and Janina (1926) Olszaniecka, probably her nieces, and with Rachela Rozen Olszaniecka (1902), probably her sister-in-law, in apartment 10 on Alexanderhof Strasse⁹. According to the collection, *Martyred Jewish Physicians*, the young woman, qualified as «internist and pediatrician», died in the Stutthof camp, near Gdańsk, or at Auschwitz¹⁰. One could presume that her family members disappeared in Łódź during their imprisonment or were deported to Chełmno – more than 70,000 people were sent there in 1942 – while Hadasa managed to survive until the summer of 1944. During that period, in fact, the Nazis proceeded with the «liquidation» of the ghetto and the deportation of the survivors to the KL-VL's of Auschwitz and Chełmno, while in the same months several thousands of inmates were transferred from Auschwitz to Stutthof, given the arrival of a new wave of

⁷ RDL 17 November 1938, n. 1728, *Provvedimenti per la difesa della razza italiana* (GU n. 264, 19 November 1938, changed to L 5 January 1939, n. 274).

⁸ See G.J. Horwitz, *Ghettostadt*, cit., pp. 30-61; Isaiah Trunk, *Łódź Ghetto. A History*, ed. by Robert Moses Shapiro, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 9-17, 267 and *passim*.

⁹ See the database *Lodz Ghetto List, ad nomen* <<https://www.jewishgen.org>> (accessed upon registration 10 December 2021). Alexanderhof Strasse was the name imposed by the Germans on Ulica Bolesława Limanowskiego. See also: a *Lodz Streets Database*, which includes the corresponding locations in the Polish and German toponymy, and a map of the ghetto at the site *Lodz KehilaLinks* <<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org>> (accessed 26 December 2021); the entry «Hadasa Olszowecka», very likely the same person, physician and resident first at Hanseaten Strasse 34 and then at Halbe Gasse 3, in the database *Poland, Łódź Ghetto Register Books, 1939-1944 (USHMM)*, accessible online at <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed upon registration 26 December 2021).

¹⁰ See the database *Polish Martyred Physicians, ad nomen* <<https://www.jewishgen.org>> (accessed upon registration 10 December 2021); see also the different *Pages of Testimony* in *The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, ad nomen* <<https://yvng.yadvashem.org>>.

deportees from Hungary¹¹.

Archival sources

- ASUFi, AC, SS, f. «Olszaniecka Hadasa».
- Biblioteca biomedica, Università di Firenze, «Flemmone del pavimento della bocca», graduation thesis, School of Medicine and Surgery, AY 1937-38, missing but catalogued.
- *The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, ad nomen* <<https://yvng.yadvashem.org>>.
- *Lodz Ghetto List, ad nomen* <<https://www.jewishgen.org>>.
- *Polish Martyred Physicians, ad nomen* <<https://www.jewishgen.org>>.

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¹¹ See I. Trunk, *Łódź Ghetto*, cit., p. 267 and *passim*; *Lodz Ghetto Deportations and Statistics* <<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org>> (accessed 26 December 2021); on the transports to the camp of Stutthof, Daniel Blatman, *The Death Marches. The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide*, Cambridge (MA) - London, Belknap Press, 2011, pp. 48, 111-112.

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