

1832-1945. The Jewish Community of Merano-Bolzano (Italy)

The Jewish community of Merano and Bolzano united people from all over Europe, mostly Eastern or from the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. This aspect distinguished it from all the other communities present in Italy, which, although rich in history and culture, were not so linguistically and culturally multicultural.

The members of the community of Merano and Bolzano had created tourism and health tourism in Merano, identifying the importance of therapeutic climate for lung diseases. Between 1800 and 1900, the city became a health resort for illustrious Jewish writers, including Kafka, who came to Merano to treat lung diseases. The Jewish doctors and hoteliers offered either to heal and relax through cultural programs of music, theater, and dance. The ongoing tourism in Merano is still present thanks to the commitment of Jews in the past centuries.

All this essential contribution to the economic development and prestige (Empress Sissi of Austria was being treated in Merano by Jewish doctors) of the city, was canceled with the advent of Italian fascism and later with the Nazi invasion in the province. The geographical position of Merano and Bolzano, i.e., the proximity to Austria, allows National Socialism to annex the province to the Third Reich. After the Armistice between Italy and Anglo American Allied, on September 8th, 1943 the Nazis invaded the country and arrived in the days immediately after the armistice in Merano, which is why they managed to organize the first Jewish deportation from Italy on September 16th.

That day there were 25 people in the community, mostly elderly. There were also very young children. Elena De Salvo, 6 years old whose mother Franziska Stern had requested to Mussolini directly the chance to bring her mother Klara from Munich (Germany) to Merano to be together. Franziska, but did not know that she had already been deported in 1942 on the first deportation from Bavaria. In Bolzano, Nazis arrested Olimpia Carpi, who was 3 years old, with her family. Another important case is Katherina Rapaport, born in Russia and had been living in Merano, who, before the deportation, was able to reach the mountain of Vervò, for hiding. The husband Leopoldo Zadra handed her over to the Nazis, together with her friend Teresa Weiss Bermann. The two women were deported first to the Reichenau camp, and then ended their days in Auschwitz.

In this context we have the Italian fascist internment camps from north to south Italy where thousands of foreign Jews, who had initially found refuge in Italy after 1933 from Germany when Hitler got the power and then from Austria in 1938 when the country was annexed (Anschluss), were locked up there before the deportation.

A very important case study, among the others, was Markus Krys. He was born in Lemberg in Galicia, then in 1908 moved to Vienna where he met Josefine Weinberger and they then decided to marry in Meran. The couple probably commuted between Vienna and Meran. In Meran, Markus Krys ran the fashion goods store "J. Weinberger" at Meraner Schlehdorfweg 1. From December 1935, the couple deregistered from the city of Vienna and settled permanently in Meran.

On August 22, 1938, Markus Krys was recorded by the fascist authorities as permanently residing in Merano in the Fascist census of "Jews", either Italian or foreigner living in Italy with the additional note: "di razza ebraica" (Jewish race). Markus and Josefine Krys left Meran on August 5, 1939, for Fondo in Trentino. They fled further to Brescia and on February 22, 1941, Markus Krys was interned in Ferramonti in the province of Cosenza, in the very south Italy, while Josefine Krys was interned in Treia (Macerata) in the center of the country. On March 7, 1941, Josephine was interned in Ferramonti camp too. On September 25, 1941, they were held in Clusone and on June 29, 1942, in Gromo both in the province of Bergamo. Markus and Josefine Krys were held in Bergamo prison

until February 23, 1944, and then they were then taken to the **Fossoli transit and concentration camp**¹ and on April 5, 1944, they were deported to Auschwitz Birkenau, where Markus and Josefine Krysz arrived on April 10, 1944, and were murdered immediately after their arrival.

THE DEPORTATION OF ITALIAN JEWS

The Italian Jews were deported from **16 September 1943**, with the first community of Merano, until **1 November 1944** with the last transport to Auschwitz from Trieste. The transport were **32** and most were direct to Auschwitz-Birkenau and among them some were transports to Bergen Belsen, Mauthausen and Dachau.

The sum of these victims is **7579** people, all identified during the research. The complex and whole story, includes those arrested and deported, those arrested who died in Italy for various causes (killings, mistreatment, inconvenience or deprivation) and also those who, despite having been arrested and imprisoned as destined for deportation, escaped for having escaped, or for having been released, or for having been freed at the end of the war. There are also those who were arrested without leaving traces and without the possibility to identify their name and surname because they entered Italy without registering at the borders. This is at least another 900-1000 people which brings the total number of victims to at least 8529.

The following tables consider only the identified deportees and those killed in Italy (6806 and 322 respectively).

- 6806 arrested and deported
- Arrested and dead in Italy 322
- Arrested and escaped in Italy 451
- Total identified **7579**



The wedding of Sarah Gans and Josef Bermann in front
Hotel Bellaria in Merano, 13 April 1926.

¹ Fossoli was either a transit camp for Auschwitz - Birkenau for the Italian Jews or a concentration camp. Primo Levi was interned here before the deportation to Auschwitz in February 1944.