

Family affairs

Part I

By Robi Auscher

As far as the Auscher stem is concerned, we could trace back its landing in the Banat around the year 1800. Apparently, they moved from Bohemia towards the south-eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire pushed by Emperor Charles VI's (1711–1740) laws which attempted to downsize the Jewish population of the Empire's villages and towns. Quite a large number of the onetime Banat and Timișoara's Jewish families migrated to gain a foothold along the same route at the same time. The Emperor issued the notorious Familiants Laws in 1726 (for Bohemia) and 1727 (for Moravia and Silesia), limiting the number of Jewish families that might legally reside in Bohemia and Moravia. The laws stipulated that only one son from any household could obtain the right to marry and establish a family. More than any other single piece of legislation, the "[Familiants Laws](#)" came to symbolize the repressive stance that the Habsburg state had taken on Jewish policy. The intent of the laws was to block Jewish mobility, stifle economic development, and discourage growth, while maintaining, at the same time, a minimum level of tax contribution. They stayed in effect until the Revolution of 1848, significantly delaying the age of marriage for most, forcing younger members of Jewish households to emigrate or, at best, to settle in the towns and villages of the nobility where they might be protected from the watchful eye of the state.

Three legends circulated in the family with regard to that period of time. The first told the story of two brothers who travelled to Vienna to get enlisted in the Imperial Army. When asked about their names they said something like Yitzhak ben Avraham and the second like Moshe ben Avraham. The military clerk said that these aren't acceptable names. Where do you come from? They said from Auscha (Ústěk, Bohemia). In this case you will be named Auscher.

A second story is related to the fact that in one of the numerous wars a military unit parked in the family's courtyard. The family cooked to feed them for several weeks. When leaving the officer asked the owner how could they reimburse his expenses. The patriarch refused to accept any payments. Then the officer took out from a box a big cross fully inlaid with diamonds. Being observant Jew, the patriarch refused again with even more vehemence. Now, the officer broke the cross so it wouldn't offend the pious Jew. He obstinately refused again. When the issue was brought up much later in the family chat, everyone deeply regretted this move. The third story is a weird one. It is unclear whether it happened still in Bohemia or already in the Banat. Have never heard it from my father but from a distant relative. A couple from the family was on his way on a carriage with two of their little kids. They were robbed and killed. The surviving orphans were brought to the rabbi of the next town who had already 14 children and said: where 14 kids could stay, sixteen could also. And adopted them. The little kids didn't know their

names and since the rabbi was from Auscha, they were also given the Auscher last name. It is possible however, that the biblical tribe name Asher was turned into Auscher, Ascher, Aschert, Anselm, Amschel and Henschel without describing any given location.

In summary, the family's origin from Auscha (Ústětk) isn't fully confirmed and it might be just an urban legend. The fact that they originated from Bohemia seems to be more supported. The new immigrant/s settled in the hilly areas of the Banat. They were observant and spoke but German. Apparently, they bought weaving machines, lent them to peasant women and sold the woven fabrics.

The first registered Auscher, first name unknown, dates back to around 1800. He had two sons, Leopold and Samuel (b. 1835). Samuel's son is my grandfather Mór, born at Luncavița: in 1860, (d. 1935, Timișoara). They settled down in Luncavița, a small Romanian hill village for two generations. Observant Jews lived in communities so they could enjoy communal services such as kosher food, school, prayer house, etc. I doubt whether there existed such a community in that village. Further, to the best of my knowledge my grandfather spoke only German and I wonder how they got along in a Romanian village. The Auscher family, as probably all of their generation there, were "Status Quo Jews". The meaning of this is understandable in the light of the present ritual divisions of the Jewish people. In the 1860's the Jewry of Hungary split into three officially separated "confessions": The Neologs (corresponding to present day Reform), the Orthodox (representing mostly the new Chassidic movement) and the "Status Quo", a kind of modern Conservatives, representing the normal evolution of the Jewish communities, especially in the Moravian centre. All three had separate communities, rabbis and synagogues. The Status Quo Ante were observant in the accepted sense, keeping kashrut, keeping all the holidays, respecting the daily rites, even when no "minyan" was present. This was the so-called Moravian rite the "Takanot Nash or Takanot Maehrin" especially adequate for the many families that lived isolated in the different villages. When they moved later from Luncavița to Lugoj or Timișoara, the family attended the orthodox synagogue. (Partially quoted from "Ivan's Story", 2004)

My grandfather Mór (Móritz) Auscher (1860-1935) born at Luncavița, Caraș Severin county, married Jakob Ehrlich's (b. 1836) daughter, Gizella (b.1867, Ezeres, d.1942, Timișoara). The spouses owned some common business in Lugoj. Mór and Gizela Auscher, née Ehrlich, had six children. Seems that they were both only children. Quite unusual for that time when families used to be large. The first two sons were born at Luncavița: Victor in 1886 (d. 1945, Timișoara) and Josef in 1887 (d. 1970, Beer Sheva, Israel). The family moved to Lugoj and Sidonia Klauber, née Auscher, the only daughter, was born there in 1890 (d. 1960, Netanya, Israel). The third son, Artur born 1896 at Lugoj, fell at the age of 20, in 1916 as flagger in the Austro-Hungarian Army at the notorious battle of Doberdo in Italy. He's buried in Timișoara. My father Ernest (Ernő) was born at Lugoj in 1901 and passed away in Tel Aviv in 1986. Emmerich (Imre) was born in Timișoara in 1903 (d. 1992, Cologne, Germany).



Victor Auscher



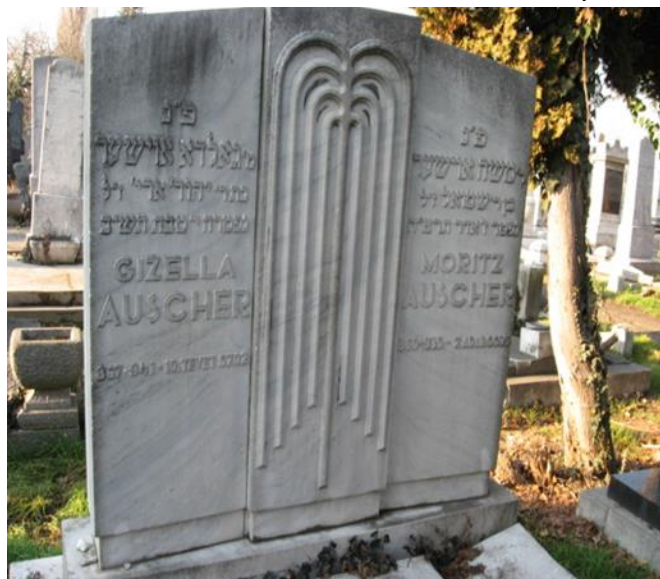
Gizella Ehrlich-Auscher



Artur Auscher

Victor married Juliska Berdach (b. 1899, Timișoara - d. 1988, Tel Aviv) and they had two daughters: Illy and Litzi. Josef married Rosalia Weinberger (b. 1899, Reșița - d. 1993, Ramat Gan, Israel) and had one daughter: Hedy (b. 1920, Timișoara - d. Ramat Gan, Israel). My dad married Clara Karczag (b. 1911, Timișoara - d. 1981, Gedera, Israel) had one son. Both Imre and Sidonia (Szidi) were childless. Thus, I was the only male heir of Mór Auscher's six children. Our son Yoad (b. 1971, Tel Aviv) is the only male who carries the Auscher surname. He is a bachelor and didn't sire any progeny.

I regard Mór Auscher and his wife, my grandmother, mother of six and business partner, as fully-fledged entrepreneurs. When they moved from Lugoj to Timișoara in 1903 they settled down in Iosefin and later Mór (Maurițiu) Auscher contributed to the construction of the Jewish elementary school in the courtyard of the orthodox synagogue in Iosefin. He never wore a kippa but the household was kosher and the family owned a whole bench in the synagogue.



Tombs of Mór and Gizella Auscher and of Artur Auscher. Jewish cemetery, Timișoara.

They bought a corner house in the Preyer Street and opened a grocery store. Quite ahead of the pack, fifteen years later they purchased across the street a parcel of land of 2.5 hectares to build a textile manufacturing plant that hired 120 employees. That was the cornerstone of their development process. I am awed by the transition my grandparents apparently went through from tradesmen to entrepreneurs. This spirit was typical of that period and it did contribute significantly to the Banat and Timișoara's flourishing. At the time many entrepreneurs, Jewish, Hungarian, German and Romanian created and developed local industry and human capital, pushing the area to prosperity. Its traces are tangible even to date.

However, the family enjoyed their entrepreneurial spirit's and the investment's fruits very little. In the early 1940s, the factory was "romanized". An Italian by the name of Vignati was appointed as formal owner/straw man by the racial laws imposed by the Antonescu government on the factory called by now Marinescu-Auscher. Matter-of-factish we were charged for this. Chief bookkeeper Dian, kept abreast the canned owners. As a result of the racial laws all young Jewish males were sent to forced labor on Romanian territory. My father was at the right age and as of 1940 he was sent to a camp somewhere in Oltenia to lay railway tracks. After three years, due to shortage of weavers, he was sent back to Timișoara to work as such in a textile factory. In the days of Allied aerial raids on Timisora, since we lived in the proximity of the railway station, we rented a room at the end of Odobescu St. with the Foale family to stay there overnight. Beforehand we were during the bombings in the Hochstrasser house's basement shelter. We could watch the burning mills and silos in the railway area from our home.

Right after WWII, around 1946 the enterprise was returned to the family. To be nationalized this time by the communist regime within a couple of years, in 1948. All four brothers worked in the family's textile factory: "Țesătoria Mecanică de Bumbac Ehrlich & Auscher Ltd." located at 40 Preyer St., Iosefin, Timișoara. After the founder's death Victor became no.1. Josef worked in administration, my father in marketing. Imre was the one who completed his studies in textile engineering in Brno (Brünn), Czechoslovakia and acted as such. At a given moment, Josef and my father established their own business. Opened a textile store in Timișoara's center in collaboration with a German businessman, Ammann. Later they rejoined the factory. As kid have spent much time at the factory. At the age of three, have left home to walk down to the factory on my own. Matter of at least seven blocks. A little toy car was apparently in urgent need of a fix and I was after Mr. Kramer, the driver. My mother was looking for me desperately but for dad, who was at the factory, my presence didn't ring a bell. He just thought that I have been brought by her. A phone call settled the mystery.

Right after the property's abusive takeover in 1948 my father was arrested for the first out of four times and kept for three months in prison. Josef and Juliska, Victor's widow were also arrested and brutally interrogated.

The enterprise is owned until today by the country's local and central authorities. The machinery was pulled out long time ago and the buildings and ground split up for housing and office space. I submitted a claim back in 2001. This was mishandled by an Israeli and a Romanian, two good-for-nothing lawyers and we were awarded after almost twenty years of tedium, the insane valuation of 12.5% of the firm shares' value, without the terrain, to be paid in tiny installments along many years. This decision is not of the previous fascist or communist regimes of Romania but of an EU member country, supposed to abide by transparent and enlightened legislation. Just unable to set the stage in that country. You're entrenched in a nasty market befitting the worst economic event in your lifetime. Either way you slice it just got a douse of cold water from an unaccountable state.



Ehrlich & Auscher textile factory, 40 Preyer St., Timișoara.

I remember one anecdote from my father's marketing experience. He used to travel around the Banat and reach out even to the Serbian Banat, Hungary and so on. He admired the decency of Serbs. Usually deals were signed with a handshake. Even if the Serbian father died and owed sums of money, the son would always pay their debts to the last cent.

I never met my grandfather, he died one year before my birth. I remember my grandmother from one Seder Pessach set up in her flat within the factory's compound when most of the family was present. I found the afikoman and was craving for some sort of military disguise on display in a toy store's window around St. George's square. It took Victor Auscher quite some time to fetch it for me. As kids we were afraid of Victor, the eldest brother. He wore glasses with a thick black frame and had a deep menacing hollow in his jaw. Whenever we played in the machines-packed weaver section, he used to lambast and chase us to show us our way out. He was an active Zionist and active in the town's Jewish community. In 1940 he was appointed member of the Commission of Social and Political Dialogue of Timișoara's Jewish community

with the country's authorities, together with Dr. Alexander Nobel, Dr. Samuel Ligeti, Dr. Izidor Tenner, Al. Rosenfeld and Carol Reiter. Since he had a permit to travel by train during the Antonescu regime, he was the one who carried together with Carol (Kari) Reiter, suitcases packed with cash to grease the palms of government officials in Bucharest and members of the royal family, to prompt them to withstand German insistence of sending the Jews of Banat and southern Transylvania to the extermination camps of eastern Europe. In this respect a major role was played by Baron Franz von Neumann in Arad. My uncle Victor died of an infection right after WWII, a short while before antibiotics appeared and could have easily saved his life.

My aunt Szidi was the only sister among five brothers. In fact, the two little brothers, Ernő and Imre were brought up by her, since grandmother was busy toiling around the factory. She was married to Josef Klauber (Jóska bácsi) who acted as one of the Managing Directors of the Alcohol Distillery of Iosefin, Timișoara. They were childless and strongly bound. Before noon he would call home to find out what's cooking for lunch. Then he crossed the Bega with the ferry bridge and took the tram for lunch and nap. They moved to Israel at an advanced age in the early 1950s and lived in a seniors' residence. Szidi died in 1960 and her husband was found hanging from the ceiling the next day.

When Imre arrived to Israel in the early 1960s he found a job as chief engineer in a textile factory to be established with government subsidy in Upper Nazareth by an investor of Turkish origin, Jimmy Levi. Mr. Levi cashed the government subsidy, vaporised and the factory's installation was delayed by years. Imre, out of his promising but onerous job and his wife Gizi left for Vienna to move later to Cologne. A drunken black G.I. attacked him there on the street, beating him up badly. He had to spend some time in a hospital. US Army paid reparations. After his death, that sum of money was stored in his legacy. They were childless, his wife passed away sooner and he didn't leave a will. The Court in Cologne began to search for possible heirs. Due to our identical last name, got a phone call from a lawyer's office to prove our relationship. After a lengthy procedure and several years of negotiations led successfully by a remote relative, attorney Ernest Laufer in Israel, his heritage was disbursed among our cousins. While in Cologne, have paid a visit to the German attorney who managed the case on behalf of the court. She was a relatively young lawyer who was very emotional during my visit in her home office. Had the feeling that I could have been the first Israeli or Jew she met and who knows what sort of history she carried. Gizi had a sister, Teri. She married Lutfi, a Turk from Adah Kaleh. During WWII they moved to Istanbul and picked up the Banat last name. The family sent containers with furniture, paintings and carpets to them. All this was stored for years and the storage costs mounted to considerable sums. The issue provided good reason for family conflicts. Being childless, Gizi and Imre liked me very much and I spent summer and winter vacations with them at Galați and Brașov where he worked. At 14 have travelled by train from Timișoara to Galați. Have been astonished to hear elder people in the Regat speaking flawless Romanian. I have never heard elder people in Timișoara who didn't display their Hungarian or German roots whenever talking Romanian.

Josef Auscher (Józsi bácsi) used to check me about my marks and was utterly disappointed when they fell under 10 or 9. When I learned Latin he taught me the sentence: "Tón a lúd átúsz, visszaúsz, átúsz." They used to speak German at home and my cousin's and her daughter's mother tongue was German. Whenever all Auscher brothers got together they used to speak German. Their preferred card play was Lórum, an old Hungarian compendium card game for 4 players.