

Stolpersteine Hamburg (Stumbling blocks of Hamburg) – A “Jewish Christian” Israel Johannes Rubanovitsch



Schulweg 48, Hamburg

Israel Johannes Rubanovitsch, born on 12.05.1866 in Rechitsa, today Belarus, arrested multiple times, killed on 4.6.1941 in extermination camp Pirna-Sonnenstein.

© Dr. Ulrich Betz, Susanne Lohmeyer

Pictures © Archiv Holstenwall

Machine translation from German, edited by Mark Rybak



Israel Johannes Rubanovich came to Hamburg from a lost, today very distant world: he was born in pre-revolutionary Russia, the son of Russian Jews, and moved as a child with his parents to Tallinn, in the Baltic province of Estland. He was born in Rechitsa. The following was written about the town in 1841: "Rechitsa, small district town, on the river of the same name, 507 versts from St. Petersburg, 869 from Moscow and 293 of Vitebsk, with 750 inhabitants." However, there is different information about his birth date and place. According to the Federal Archives memorial book he was born on 25.05.1864 in Resicabánya, a small industrial town in the former Banat Mountains in Hungary. Records also contain various birth dates, but the most probable is 12.05.1866.¹

¹ The list of Jewish men living in Tallinn in 1874 (EAA.30.5.4275) gives Israel Rubanovitsch, 8 years old, father – Ruven Rubanovitsch, retired soldier, a petit bourgeois from Novogrudski district, Minsk province. [Mark Rybak]

Israel Rubanovich came from a devout Jewish family and was given the Jewish name of Israel. He got the name John (Johannes) later at his conversion and baptism. His parents were Reuven and Rebecca (Rivka) Rubanovitsch. The father had been a soldier as recorded in the baptismal certificate. About 1872 the family moved to Estonia in the Baltic city of Reval (now Tallinn). Israel Rubanovich had three younger sisters : Sophie Helen (born 1871), Rachel (b. 1873) and Lea (born in 1878) . Shortly after the birth of the youngest daughter the father died at the age of 38 years.

Israel Rubanovitsch received instruction in the Jewish faith and the Hebrew language. He spoke as a young boy Russian, German and Estonian and later learned some more languages. After completion of the German elementary school for boys in Tallinn, he began a leather shaft making apprenticeship and then worked at a cobbler. Under the influence of a pious Protestant kindergarten teacher who supervised his sister, he turned to the Protestant faith. Adele Krause, which must have been a wealthy woman he later called his "religious nut".

On the occasion of his baptism on 16 June 1885 in the St. Olav Church in Tallinn, he received the name Johannes. His mother and two of his sisters were also baptized at the same time. Through mediation he was inducted in the same year in the training in Mission Center Neukirchen near Moers and completed a three-year study. Already during his training period his evangelistic charisma was obvious. Because of illness in the autumn of 1889 he returned to Reval. From Christmas 1889, he preached in Estonia, mainly in Herrnhuter Gemeinde, the Moravian Brothers. In 1892 he attended again a study visit of the institution Neukirchen, undertook lecture tours through the major cities of Germany and returned again back to Estonia. He must have been an impressive preacher, because supposedly there are still communities in Estonia that were founded by Johannes Rubanovitsch. This applies for example for a community in Pärnu (formerly Pernau). Until the early 1930s, Rubanovitsch visited Tallinn regularly, last time probably in the autumn of 1934.

[...]

In 1895 Johannes married Ida Helene Lohberg Rubanovitsch in Reval (born on 19.09.1855 in Tallinn), whose parents George and Therese Lohberg (born Frei), were probably German Balts . Ida Helene was also Lutheran. The couple moved his residence from Tallinn to Schwelm. Their only child, daughter Elizabeth (1896-1982) was born there. The family stayed half a year in Schwelm and then moved for five years to Strasbourg in Alsace, from where Israel Johannes Rubanovitsch worked as a "Itinerant preacher". In 1896/97 he preached in Langnau in Switzerland and in Dillingen, Easter 1898 in Berlin, in October in Szczecin, and 1900-1902 he stayed mainly in Silesia and was nicknamed "the awakener of Silesia". In 1896 and 1898, he was probably in Hamburg, preaching the gospel and many people were so impressed that they picked him in 1902 to Hamburg and to the spiritual leader of the Hollstenwall community, including the Deaconess home called "Elim". The ecclesial community of Hamburg-Hollstenwahl carried then the name "Philadelphia". From 1904, Johannes Rubanovitsch published a weekly " What does the Scripture say? ". The apartment of the Rubanovitsch family was always at Schulweg 48.

In 1910 Israel Johannes Rubanovich submitted application in Hamburg for himself and his wife to apply for naturalization, and on 19 December 1912 decreed the Russian Committee of Ministers to dismiss him from the citizenship of Russia. He became a citizen of Hamburg. In the grounds for a positive decision was also stated that Johannes Rubanovitsch for many years belonged to the Christian faith. [...]



The following period was characterized in Rabinovitsch's theological thought and the Sermons to an ever closer approximation to the Talmud, which led to tensions in the community. On 4 September 1914 his wife died. She had been ailing from a young age and probably also suffered from depression. Rumors about a "scandalous way of life" only contributed to the tensions. End of September 1918 it came to a break with the community. At end of October 1918 Rubanovitsch with his followers founded a new church, the "Evangelical Church community" based on Holstenwall 12. This community was also called "community under the white horse". The conflicts in the Christian community are difficult to understand today. Israel Johannes Rubanovitsch had a very authoritarian style of leadership. But many members of the community - in the period of his activity, many members had been won - adored him and called him "Father".

Among other things, due to the conflict in the community Johannes Rubanovitsch's health in the early 1920s deteriorated and he therefore accepted an offer from Frankfurt am Main to live in a doctor's household. Between 1921 and 1924 he stayed there several times for long periods of time. At this time apparently matured his plan to contact the Moravian writer Alice von Wiedebach-Nostiz. In her home in November 1925 he held devotions.

On the assumption of power by the National Socialists, the community and their preacher "Jewish Christian" did not remain unaffected. In the beginning of 1935 Rubanovitsch, now regarded as "racial Jew", was arrested, his assets were seized; his magazine "The full salvation," which was published from December 1929 was prohibited. The daily reports of the Hamburg Gestapo to Berlin mention his arrest on 28th of February because of "suspicious folk-destructive behavior and subversive statements". The seizure of the assets was lifted, but the "Evangelical Church community" Holstenwall 12 was dissolved and prohibited for the entire Hamburg state area according to the official Gazette of 13 March 1935. Israel Johannes Rubanovitsch received a Reich-wide ban on preaching. In the following years he remained unmolested until the end of 1938 when his assets were frozen by "security arrangement" to a monthly sum of 300 Reichsmarks (RM) with the usual reason: "You are a Jew, it is expected that you will emigrate in the nearest time." He was allowed to give his daughter Elizabeth securities worth RM 30,000 (she was by Nazi definition a "Mischling" (a crossbreed) and to bequeath his former "Aryan" domestics sister Grete Lindenburg 1700 RM. For "Jewish Capital levy" he had to pay about RM 8,000 securities from its own portfolio.

Israel Johannes Rubanovitsch was finally arrested on 29th of July 1939. He was in "protective custody" in the police prison Fuhlsbüttel from 5th October 1939 to 11 April 1940. On 15 April 1940, the Gestapo transferred him to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where his prisoner no. was 18591. In 1940 very many prisoners were admitted to Sachsenhausen, and because of the disastrous living conditions there, the number of incapacitated inmates rose sharply. For the Nazis, they were "dead weight existences". In April 1941, the physician Friedrich Mennecke performed a selection and chose 400 prisoners for the action "14f13". This action with the bureaucratic shortcut was time between the "euthanasia" of the "mentally" and physically handicapped and the organized mass murder of the Jews. Inmates of concentration camps were selected and murdered in three death camps with gas. In early June, when the 131 selectees from Sachsenhausen had already died, the others, among them 29 Jews, including Israel Johannes Rubanovitsch have been brought into the Pirna-Sonnenstein camp and murdered.

After the war, the daughter succeeded to bring the alleged remains in an urn to Hamburg and to bury in the cemetery at Diebsteich. Elizabeth Rubanovitsch died in 1982.

[The list of used literature is omitted here. MR]