

Mockstraat 44 – Wigdor Altman – Mala Altman-Klotz

Ernst Homburg, April 2023

In order not to forget them.

In this house in the Mockstaat, number 44 – formerly number 11 – lived the Altman family. When the Nazis occupied The Netherlands, in May 1940, it included the textile merchant Viktor, or Wigdor, Altman, and his wife, Malcia, or Mala, née Klotz.¹ Viktor and Malcia were murdered in Auschwitz because they were Jews. Their sons Julius (or Yuli, born 1916), Bernd (or Dov, born 1919) and Ernst (or Asher, born 1923) survived the war. Before May 1940 they all emigrated to Mandatory Palestine, that later became Israel. I am very grateful that children and grandchildren of Yuli and Dov are present today at this ceremony, and also that Mika Netzer is present, a member of the family who helped me tremendously with my investigations. I also profited from notes on Yuli memories, and from an extensive extract translated by Mika from the Memoirs written in Hebrew by Max Schancer (later Max Netzer), a nephew of Viktor.

Both Malcia and Viktor were born in Galicia. Malcia in the village Obydów near Kamionka – now Obydiv near Kamjanka in Ukrain – about 50 kilometers north-east of the capital of Eastern Galicia, Lviv, and Viktor in the village of Kossowa near Brzeźnica, about 40 kilometers west of the capital of Western Galicia, Kraków. Galicia then was part of the Habsburg empire. It was a kind of homeland for the Jews of Eastern Europe, because they were left alone and could live their own lives under Austrian rule. This changed completely after the outbreak of First World War. Galicia

¹ In the formal Dutch administration the names used are probably spelled the way they occurred on the birth certificates, namely Wigdor, for Viktor, and Mala, for Malcia or Malka. But in order not to confuse the reader I use in this text the names that are used most frequently in the Memoirs of Max Netzer, those were the names used by the family. On the Stolpersteine the names are shown as noted down by the official Dutch administration.

became the theatre of battles between Austrian and Russian troops, and of raids by antisemite Cossacks. It also suffered from Russian occupation of parts of the country. After the war, terror continued by ethnophobic nationalists fighting for Polish and Ukrainian independence. Pogroms and aggression against the Jews became almost daily practice. Many Jewish families emigrated from Galicia, including members of the Altman and the Klotz families.²

Malcia was born on 6 August 1887 as daughter of Josef Natan Klotz and Esther Turteltaub. She had one older brother, Morderchai, and three younger sisters: Frieda, or Frimet, born on 30 December 1897 or 1899,³ Berta, born 30 December 1899, and the younger Rebecca, from a second marriage of her father, after the death of the mother of the first four children. When Malcia grew up, and her father had remarried, it seemed better for her personal development to move to Kraków, where a brother of her father lived. There she also received some elementary education. She was followed by her sister Frieda, who moved to Kraków as well.⁴ That town was in the first decade of the twentieth century a booming city that attracted many young people from the countryside, looking for a better future. Among them was Viktor, who met Malcia in those years.

Viktor was the fourth of eight children of Ber Schancer, and (probably) Malka Altman, Ber's second wife. He was born on 25 February 1889. His brother Leo Schancer, born 10 January 1882 was the third in line, and his brother Josef, or Izchak, Schancer was number six, born on 3 February 1896. After meeting each other in Kraków, Malcia and

² Joseph Roth, for instance, fled to Vienna, as did the families of Jacob Wasserstein and Manès Sperber. See: Keiron Pim, *Endless Flight: The Life of Joseph Roth* (London: Granta, 2022); Manès Sperber, *De waterdragers van God* (Zorgvlied: Van Maaskant Haun, 2022); Bernard Wasserstein, *A Small Town in Ukraine: The place we came from, the place we went back to* (London: Penguin, 2023). See also: Ilsa Josepha Lazaroms, De Groene, 17 November 2022; Michiel Krielaars, NRC, 17 February 2023; NRC, 1 March 2023

³ The sources are contradictory. Joods Monument and the files of the Joodse Raad say 30 December 1899, but strangely enough Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot) makes no remark that Frieda and his mother Berta were twins. Other sources state that Frieda was born on 30 December 1897 (mail Mika Netzer, 26 Aug. 2022).

⁴ Frieda was also called Frimet, esp. later by family that moved to Israel. The name Frimet was also used on the Stolperstein placed at Scharnerweg 57 in her memory. See: [Butterteig-Klotz, Frimet – Struikelsteentjes \(struikelsteentjes-maastricht.nl\)](https://www.butterteig-klotz-frimet-struikelsteentjes-struikelsteentjes-maastricht.nl).

Viktor fell in love, and with the help of Malcia's uncle the family in Obydów could be convinced that he was a good and proper partner for their daughter.⁵ The religious marriage followed on 7 August 1911 in Kamionka, and the civil marriage in Kraków on 4 April 1912.⁶ Malcia became pregnant quite soon, and in order to help the young couple she asked her sister Berta, who then was 12 years of age, to come to Kraków to support the family. So, in 1912 the three sisters Malcia, Frieda and Berta all were together again. They would stay close to each other for the rest of their lives. Malcia had two miscarriages, but on 4 November 1916 the eldest son Julius was born.

In the meantime the First World War had broken out, and Viktor had to serve in the Austrian army from 1914 onwards. He became a sergeant and medical assistant (*Sanitäter*), and in this way acquired knowledge of medicine that would serve him his entire life. Also his younger brother Josef had become a soldier. But he was taken prisoner of war, and was transported to a Russian penal camp near the Ural.⁷

When Josef after many wanderings finally returned to Kraków in 1922, both the personal and the political situation had greatly changed. A second son, Bernd, had been born into Viktor and Malcia's family on 23 November 1919, and the following year Frieda married Nachman (Natan) Butterteig. Kraków had now become a Polish city, and not the Austrian one the members of the Schancer and Klotz families were accustomed to.⁸ When Josef returned to Kraków he had seen so much terror and antisemitism on this way from the Ural region that the decision was taken that the three Klotz sisters and their partners – Berta had become Josef's fiancée – would

⁵ Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot).

⁶ This is my interpretation. Two marriages are reported, and I assume the first was a religious marriage. For the date of 7 August 1911 in Kamionka/ Kamwoka see Persoonskaarten of Wigdor Altman and Mala Klotz. And for the date of 4 April 1912 in the records of Kraków, see: Jewishgen, marriages Krakow.

⁷ Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot).

⁸ I don't know whether it was difficult or not for Austrian jews to become Polish citizens. In most later Dutch documents members of the Altman and the Butterteig families were called 'statelees' because they probably had lost Austrian citizenship and not obtained a new one.

emigrate to Essen in Germany, where Viktor's and Josef's elder brother Leo lived already for more than ten years.⁹

Josef and Berta left first, already in 1922. After they arrived in Essen, they married there on 2 February 1923.¹⁰ Viktor and Malcia and their two sons left a little later, and had to pause on the way to Essen in the town of Elberfeld (now Wuppertal), because Malcia was in the last days of her pregnancy. They found a (temporary) home in the Vogelstrasse 106, and there on 27 June 1923 the third son, Ernst was born. By then, Viktor had apparently changed his family name from Schancer to Altman, because in the birth certificate of Ernst the name Altman is used.¹¹ When exactly Viktor changed his name is not known. Later that year he and his family continued their journey to Essen. Nachman and Frieda followed in 1927. They all lived quite close to each other, and Max Netzer – son of Josef and Berta born in 1926 – tells that he visited his aunts and cousins very frequently. Aunt Malcia ‘was always cheerful and made time for us. First she took care of me. She believed that a boy should not go a moment without food and therefore she always had a delicacy ready for me.’¹²

Viktor and his family first lived for several years at Schwanenkampstrasse 8, and later during some years at Unionstrasse 45. The Schancer brothers Viktor and Josef, who had practiced photography before, started at Postallee 69 a ‘Kunstanstalt’ together, a photo studio for the enlargement and printing of photographs. In those years there are documents in which Viktor is listed as ‘Viktor Altman, called Schancer’.¹³ The family was then reasonably well to do. They had a Jewish traditional lifestyle. Julius and his two brothers attended a Jewish school, and on Saturdays and holidays they visited the synagogue. Their rather spacious house was well-furnished,¹⁴ and after primary school

⁹ Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot).

¹⁰ Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot).

¹¹ Birth certificate Nr. 1452, dated 2 July 1923, received by email from the archives of Wuppertal on 24 August 2022.

¹² Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot).

¹³ In Address Books and a Telephone Book (1927) of Essen he was still listed as Viktor Schancer, next to Josef Schancer, and Leopold Schancer. Also: email Jutta Vonrücken-Ferner, Haus der Essener Geschichte/ Stadtarchiv Essen, from 21 July 2022, with copies of ‘Meldekarten’ of Josef Schancer and Leopold Schancer.

¹⁴ For a detailed overview see Max Netzer's Memoirs.

son Julius went to the local Humboldt Gymnasium, where he was one of the best pupils of his class.

Then in 1929 the Great Depression broke out and during the following years the Nazis gradually moved to power. Josef and Viktor had to close their 'Kunstanstalt'. Viktor became a merchant, and started a trade in beddings, tablecloth and other laundry. In those days, the family was also thinking of emigrating to Mandatory Palestine, now Israel. Julius became member of a Zionist youth movement – Hashomer HaTza'ir – inspired by Jewish settlers from Mandatory Palestine who came along and told stories about agricultural settlements in the country. In 1932 or 1933 Julius was insulted and attacked by a group of boys with Nazi sympathies, and when he defended himself they called the police, who went after him. The situation in Germany became unsafe. Julius, then 17 years old, therefore decided to travel to Amsterdam, and try to emigrate from there.¹⁵ The picture shown at here at this ceremony was probably taken in Essen shortly before he left.¹⁶ In Amsterdam Julius found a job in a restaurant as a dishwasher and as a cook's assistant and from that he made a living.¹⁷ It did not take long before the rest of the family also decided to emigrate to Holland. They pretended to have a Saturday family trip on the river Rhine, but after the ship had crossed the border and arrived in Holland, the "tourists" Viktor, Malcia, Bernd and Ernst got off the ship and traveled by train to Amsterdam. There the family supported Julius with money to book a ship to Mandatory Palestine. He arrived there in 1933.¹⁸

For Viktor it was difficult to find a living in Amsterdam. The family decided to move to the village of Heer, close to the town of Maastricht, in the south of The Netherlands.¹⁹ In the summer of 1933 they found a house at Demertstraat 11, which then was on the outskirts of the village. There Viktor started his trade in textiles and

¹⁵ Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot). See also: Hermann Schröter, *Geschichte und Schicksal der Essener Juden: Gedenkbuch für die jüdische Mitbürger der Stadt Essen* (Essen: Stadt Essen, 1980), pp. 465-466.

¹⁶ My assumption.

¹⁷ See especially: [Danny Netzer], 'a free translation of of Yehuda (Yuli) Netzer memories (highlights) as those were "word of mouth" told during the years in our family', Rehovot, Israel, August 2022.

¹⁸ Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot).

¹⁹ Wigdor and Mala Altman were registered as Polish citizens in The Netherland. A note on the Persoonkaarten of Wigdor and of Mala states that their nationality was later declared as abolished.

laundry again on 13 June 1933.²⁰ His brother Josef in Essen arranged a huge wagon belonging to a furniture transport company, pulled by two draft horses, to move all the belongings of the family from Essen to Heer. A distance of about 140 kilometers. In 1934 Nachman and Frieda left Germany as well. After a short stay in Northern France, they also went to Heer near Maastricht, and settled in the same house as the family of Viktor and Malcia. Max Netzer, whose parents stayed in Essen, went every summer holiday to his aunts and uncles in Heer. He described the place as a two-storey rural small house, which a shared kitchen on the ground floor, with water drawn from a hand pump located in the courtyard behind the kitchen.²¹ The boys Bernd and Ernst went to Dutch schools. Bernd only for a short time though, because he decided to follow his older brother to Mandatory Palestine and emigrated in June 1935.²² In a letter to the Jewish Documentation Center (Alte Synagoge) in Essen, Ernst wrote in 1982: ‘I went to elementary and middle school in Holland. I also attended a vocational school with the aim of being trained as a professional craftsman in order to secure a livelihood after emigrating to Palestine.’²³

Economically these were hard times. Viktor and Nachman rode on their bicycles around the villages of the region to peddle with clothes, fabrics and suits. A little later Viktor started selling on credit, as he was forbidden by the authorities to have a public shop. The Butterteig family moved to a new address in 1935, and later to the Scharnerweg 57 in Maastricht, where ‘Stumbling Stones’ have been placed for them.²⁴ Viktor Altman and his family also left the house at the Demertstraat and settled at the end of 1936 at Akersteenweg 21 in Heer – now Akersteenweg 33.²⁵ A few years later the family moved again to a new address where a few years earlier a more modern house was built: Mockstraat 11 in Heer (now 44), the place we are standing today.²⁶

²⁰ KvK – Erik vR. The official entry in the municipal registers followed as late as February 1934

²¹ Max Netzer in his Memoirs (Zikhronot).

²² See Persoonskaart of Wigdor Altman.

²³ Letter BR 196: Gilead Ascher, 5.1.1982, via Martina Strehlen, Alte Synagoge, Essen. (email 25 July 2022)

²⁴ See: [Butterteig-Klotz, Frimet – Struikelsteentjes \(struikelsteentjes-maastricht.nl\)](https://www.butterteig-klotz.com/).

²⁵ After the Altman family left the Brzeziner family lived there, and were deported from that address, were now Stolpersteine have been placed. See: [Brzeziner, Szlama – Struikelsteentjes \(struikelsteentjes-maastricht.nl\)](https://www.brzeziner-szlama.com/).

²⁶ Woningkaart Heer, Mockstraat 11 (now 44), Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg (HCL). My special thanks go to my friend Dik Bol, who reconstructed the present location of the former address Mockstraat 11, with the help of historical research in the land register/ cadaster. The exact date of the relocation of the Altman’s

On 10 May 1940 German troops crossed the Dutch border, and only a few days later – after the destructive aerial bombardment of Rotterdam – the temporary government surrendered. Ernst Altman, as mentioned above, left the country just in time on 26 March 1940.²⁷ Of course, his parents would have loved to join him, but the British authorities refused to give them a permit. They only let young people enter the country as part of their very restrictive Aliyah policies.

After the German invasion of May 1940 the situation for the Jewish population deteriorated rapidly. Via the Red Cross there was some correspondence between the three sons in Mandatory Palestine and Viktor and Malcia in Heer. At the end of October 1940 Viktor wrote to his children ‘we are healthy, and we are doing well, as before’, undoubtedly to keep the spirit high. Interrupted correspondence continued until 1942.²⁸ In the meantime though, in March 1942, Viktor was prohibited to continue his business. Life for Jews became increasingly difficult.

In August 1942 the first large deportation of the Jewish population was organized in the Province of Limburg. On 24 August twelve Jewish citizens of the village of Heer received a letter that they should be present the next day at 4 PM at a school at the Professor Pieter Willemstraat at Maastricht, close to the railway station. Viktor and Malcia were among those twelve. They went there the next day,²⁹ with hundreds of others from the region, and were put on transport by train to the concentration camp of Westerbork in the north of The Netherlands, where they arrived on 26 August 1942. Already two days later, on 28 August, they were put on a train to Auschwitz.³⁰ This was the 14th transport from Westerbork to Auschwitz, with a total of 608 persons.

could not be found. Early 1940 the Van Wersch family lived still there. See an advertisement in the *Limburger Koerier* of 27 January 1940. I assume Viktor and Malcia Altman relocated shortly thereafter. Perhaps after Ernst left, when they could move to a smaller – and probably cheaper – house.

²⁷ See Persoonskaart of Wigdor Altman.

²⁸ Copies of brief letters from the three sons to their parents, dated 21 Aug. 1940, communicated via the International Red Cross, and a brief reply from the parents dated 29 Oct. 1940; and letter BR 196: Dov Nezer, 3.9.1983, both documents obtained from Martina Strehlen, Alte Synagoge, Essen. (email 25 July 2022).

²⁹ Shortly after they left a German NSDAP-member occupied part of their house at the Mockstraat.

³⁰ See card system Joodse Raad: Wigdor Altman, and Mala Altman-Klotz.

Upon arrived at Auschwitz they were murdered almost immediately, on 31 August 1942. Malcia was 55 years of age, and Viktor 53 years.

May their memory be a blessing!