

Werner Cohn (Goerke)

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Werner Cohn was born in 1914 in Danzig to Adolph, a wholesale merchant, and Else Goerke, both of the Jewish faith¹.

Part of the Reich up until 1919, when it became a Free City as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, the Hanseatic city had a German-speaking majority that harboured much resentment towards the conditions the Treaty had imposed upon Germany; characterised by a significant Nazi presence, Danzig was the epicentre of a violent anti-Semitic persecution in 1933². The family moved to Breslavia (probably following the death of Werner's father), where the young Werner received a diploma from the Humanities school of the Johannes-Gymnasium. In 1932 he went to the Franz Leopold Universität summer school in Innsbruck, afterwards enrolling at the Friedrich Wilhelm Universität in Breslavia in the 1932/1933 academic year.³

After the Nazi Party came to power, Werner Cohn decided to move to Florence, where, in the autumn of 1933 he started to attend lectures in the Facoltà di Lettere. He graduated on 17th November 1937 with 110/110; Werner wrote his thesis in History of Art on «Agostino di Giovanni, Agnolo di Ventura, Giovanni D'Agostino scultori ed architetti (sculptors and architects)», with Mario Salmi as his supervisor⁴.

Subsequently, he applied to attend a post-graduate course in History of Art⁵.

1 ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Cohn Werner», authenticated translation of his birth certificate, October 3rd 1933. Werner Cohn is not to be mistaken for his namesake, who was an art historian (1905-1960).

2 For bibliographical references see Wolfgang Gippert, *Die «Lösung der Judenfrage» in der Freien Stadt Danzig*, «Zukunft braucht Erinnerung», 2007 <<https://www.zukunft-braucht-erinnerung.de/>> (accessed on March 31st 2019).

3 ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Cohn Werner», certificate of enrolment, academic year 1933-34; authenticated translation of the certificate of attendance of the Friedrich Wilhelm Universität in Breslavia.

4 Ivi, R. Università degli Studi di Firenze, Facoltà di Lettere, oral account of his graduation exam, November 17th 1937.

5 Ivi, Application sent to the Vice-Chancellor. Cohn lived for a while with professor Chiarugi, a doctor and university professor.

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It is not clear if he managed to complete the post-graduate course; however, we know for certain that he worked on several scientific papers under the name Werner Cohn-Goerke, so as to distinguish himself from his namesake, a famous art historian who had also fled to Italy and was a few years his elder. Between 1938 and 1939 he published several articles and reviews for the «Rivista d'arte» and the prestigious «Burlington Magazine»⁶.

No information regarding his life after 1938 has been found. A piece of reliable information can be found in one of the letters written by Ilse Ursell, secretary of the British Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, sent to the German art historian Gertrud Bing, who emigrated to London in 1933: Ursell wrote, in 1948, that Cohn had stayed in London as a guest of Arthur Lyon Bowley, professor of economic statistics at the London School of Economics; however, Werner returned to Paris and was subsequently deported to Auschwitz⁷. It is thus possible to identify as Werner Cohn the young intellectual deported, on September 2nd 1942, from Drancy to Auschwitz on transport 27⁸. His wife, Hella Levy, was arrested in Rome after September 8th 1943 (the date of the Italian Armistice) and deported to Auschwitz, where she met her death⁹.

Major publications

- *Scultori senesi del Trecento*, «Rivista d'arte», 20, 1938, pp. 242-289.
- *Scultori senesi del Trecento*, «Rivista d'arte», 21, 1939, pp. 1-22.

⁶ Cf. e.g. Werner Cohn Goerke, *Giovanni D'Agostino*, «The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs», 75, 440, 1939, pp. 180, 184-189, 192-194.

⁷ BLO, MS, SPSL, b. 185/3, f. «Cohn Werner», Ilse Ursell to Gertrud Bing, March 12th 1948; the collection refers to his namesake, born in Berlin in 1905, however it also mentions the young art historian from Danzig. Regarding Gertrud Bing cf. *Dictionary of Art Historians, ad nomen* <<http://arthistorians.info>> (accessed on December 5th 2019).

⁸ *The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, ad nomen* <<https://yvng.yadvashem.org/>> (accessed on December 5th 2019). In the database many entries related to the same name can be found; in one entry, where the information was taken from the list of Drancy deportees, Werner's date of birth matches, although his birthplace is missing; in another entry, based on a relative's testimony, Cohn died around 1942 in the South of France or in North Africa.

⁹ *I nomi della Shoah italiana, ad nomen* <<http://www.nomidellashoah.it>> (accessed on March 31st 2019). Hella Levy, daughter of Erich Levy and Wally Joscerly, was born in Germany in 1913.

- *Catalogo della mostra di sculture d'arte senese del XV secolo*, «Rivista d'arte», 21, 1939, pp. 187-192 (review).
- *Giovanni D'Agostino*, «The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs», 75, 440, 1939, pp. 180, 184-189, 192-194.
- *Paolo Uccello, Andrea del Castagno, Domenico Veneziano* by Mario Salmi, «The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs», p. 216 (review).
- *Fonti manoscritte inedite per la storia dell'arte nel Trentino* by Giulio Benedetto Emert; *Dialogo di Donato Giannotti* by Deoclecio Redig de Campos, «The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs», p. 218 (review).

Archival sources

- ASUFi, AC, SS, f. «Cohn Werner».
- *The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, ad nomen* <<https://yvng.yadvashem.org>>.
- *I nomi della Shoah italiana*, «Hella Levy» <<http://www.nomidellashoah.it>>.

Bibliography

- Roberto Bartalini, *Per la scultura senese del Trecento: Agostino di Giovanni*, «Prospettiva», 108, 2002, pp. 2-35.

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