

Dr. Amália Frisch among Women and Wars, Istanbul to Budapest

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Abstract. Amália Frisch was born in Edirne/Adrianople, Turkey, in 1882. She came from an immigrant Jewish family from Hungary. Following her graduation from the American College for Girls in Istanbul in 1901, she travelled to Switzerland for her medical education. Amália Frisch graduated from the school of medicine in Bern in 1907, and received her MD (Doctor universae medicinae) degree from Zurich University in 1908. She specialised in gynaecology at the Vienna University Clinics, before returning to Istanbul. In the December of 1908, Dr. Amália Frisch was appointed voluntary intern at the Austro-Hungarian Hospital in Galata to attend the women's ward. During the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 the hospital housed the wounded of the Turkish Army in its Pancaldi premises, and Amália Frisch received medals of merit for her services both from the Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph I and the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed Reschad V. Amália Frisch was an active member of the Ottoman Society for the Protection of Women's Rights (est. 1913). She was deported by the French occupation command in 1919 and returned to Budapest, after which she altered her profession to stomatology and dentistry. Amália Frisch passed away in Budapest during the Second World War, in 1941.

Key words: Amália Frisch, female physicians, women rights, Turkey, Hungary, Austria

Introduction

It has always been fraught with difficulties to join medical profession for women; the obstacles were political as well as social. Women were barred from attending university in Turkey, until the beginning of the First World War, and the few who could travel abroad to study medicine were not permitted to practice independently. The first female physicians of the Empire were members of the non-muslim '*millet*' (nations) and were only unwillingly supported by their own communities (1). It was during the turbulent stages of history that their professional roles were esteemed and services sought after.

Edirne

Amália Frisch was the daughter of an Ashkenaz Jewish family, who had emigrated from Hungary to Edirne/Adrianople in Turkey, at the beginning of the 1880's. Amália's father, József Frisch (Esztergom/Gran, 14.01.1849 – Istanbul, 15.01.1918) is known to have attended medical school in Vienna between the years 1871-1876 (2). For unknown personal reasons József Frisch did not pursue his studies after the spring semester of 1876, and was not entitled to receive his Doctor of Medicine diploma. Her mother Fanny Frisch (born Franziska/Fanny: Winterstein, 28.01.1864 – Budapest 1945) was from Šid, Serbia (3). The reason for their emigration could not be established.

Amália was born in Edirne on the 10th of November 1882. At that time her father was registered locally as a 'Kaufmann' (4). His name, however, is not listed among the 'commissionaires' or 'négociants' of the city (5). Amália may have attended the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* girls' school in the same town, whose principal was of Hungarian descent (6).

Istanbul, Bern and Zürich

In the year 1896 the name József Frisch appears as a dentist in Istanbul, at the Reschid Pacha district (no. 22) of Bechiktache/Beşiktaş on the Bosphorus (7). This date corresponds to the beginning of Amalia's studies at the American College for Girls, then located in Scutari. Amália (Amélie) Frisch graduated from the college in 1901 (8-10), and was a classmate of Miss Halide Edib, the first muslim graduate of the school (11,12). In this year we see the name of Mme. Fanny Frisch as 'dentiste' at the same address with József Frisch (13). In all likelihood, József Frisch's certificates and transcripts were translated into a permit for practicing dentistry – instead of as a medical doctor. The majority of dentists in Turkey did not hold diplomas, but were issued practice permits by the health authority. Presumably, József trained his wife Fanny, and she was also certified with a *Permis d'exercice pour l'art de dentiste (Deuxième classe)* to practice in her own name (14).

After her graduation from the American College in Istanbul, Amália Frisch started medical school in Bern, Switzerland, and received her medical Med. pract. (*Medicus practicus*) degree in the summer of 1907. Swiss universities were supportive of women's education (15), and this could have been a reason for her preference for Bern over Vienna, where Amália was to pursue her clinical studies. Subsequently, she moved to Zurich, and received a Dr.med. (*Doctor universae medicinae*) degree in 1908, with a thesis entitled *Über Herpes Zoster nach Beobachtungen auf der medizinischen Universitätsklinik Zürich* (16).

Dr. Amália Frisch visited clinics in Paris and London, before arriving in Vienna to attend the Second Gynaecology University Clinic (Prof. Dr. Alphons von Rosthorn) as 'Praktikantin'. She was reunited with her family in Istanbul in December 1908. By then the

Constitutional Revolution of July 23rd 1908, better known as the 'Young Turk Revolution', had created a new atmosphere of liberty within the Ottoman Empire. Dr. Amália Frisch repeatedly presented petitions for her registration as a medical doctor, but her request to take the qualification examination was denied.

Österreichisch-ungarischen Nationalspital in Konstantinopel

Shortly after her arrival in Istanbul Dr. Amália Frisch started working at the Austro-Hungarian Hospital (*K.u.K. österr.-ungar. Nationalspital*) in the Azapkapı/Galata district, first as an 'intern' (*Volontärin*). This entitlement would have been under a special arrangement, because her medical degree was not officially recognized at this stage. Amália, besides Hungarian and German, was fluent in French, English and Turkish, and could also speak Greek, Armenian and Italian. She was the only woman physician in the capital city (17), and female patients of many nationalities flocked to the hospital, where she could perform gynaecological operations. Thus, Amália Frisch became one of the first female physicians in Turkey – together with Drs. Zaruhi Kavalcıyan (Zarouhi Kavaldjian) (18) and Ophelia Nergarian (19).

Fr. Fanny Frisch, had moved her dentistry practice to the main street of the city centre (Grand rue de Péra, no. 452) when Amália returned to Turkey (20). This address is also given as the residence of Dr. Amália Frisch (21). Her father Dr. József Frisch seems to have left Beşiktaş for Péra somewhat later in 1911 (22).

Dr. Amália Frisch also rendered her services to the Palace: "Now, some days ago she was called to the wife of prince Zia-Eddin, the eldest son of the Sultan. The lady stood just before delivery. Prince Zia-Eddin has already five daughters, and now finally also the eagerly awaited prince. Nizam-Eddin (sic) came into the world being the first grandson of the Sultan [V. Mehmed Reschad]. At the delivery only the Hungarian Miss Doctor [Amália Frisch] was present, while all other court physicians were dismissed" (23).

The Balkan Wars which broke out in October 1912 and continued for a year brought hundreds of wounded and ill soldiers from the Turkish army to the Austro-Hungarian hospital (24). The crisis created by

the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was forgotten, and Austria-Hungary and Turkey were allied once again. Dr. Amália Frisch received both a Golden Cross of Service with the Crown (*Goldene Verdienstkreuz mit der Krone*) from the Emperor of Austria and the King of Hungary Franz Joseph (25), and the golden medal of Merit (*Liyakat*) from Sultan V. Mehmed Reshad (26), for her services during the Balkan Wars. This was the first medal to be conferred to a Hungarian woman. She went on to receive the medal of the Austro-Hungarian Red Cross (*Ehrenzeichen zweiter Klasse vom Rotenkreuz mit Kriegsdekoration*) (27), and the bronze medal of the Ottoman Red Crescent Central Committee. Dr. Amália Frisch received her fifth medal, the *Kriegskreuz für Zivilverdienst 3. Klasse* in 1917 (28).

Amália Frisch was an active member of the *Ottoman Society for the Protection of Women's Rights* established in 1913 (Fig. 1). She was a major contributor to the activities of this first 'feminist' association in Turkey. It is likely that she attended various functions organised

by women from the different communities of the city (29). As a female physician, however, she was not invited to join the Ottoman *Société Impérial de Médecine de Constantinople* (est. 1856), or the *Association des Médecins Israélites de l'Empire Ottoman* (est. 1914).

Dr. Amália Frisch's name appears in the year-book of the Austrian Foreign Service as early as 1909, as a physician of the Austro-Hungarian Hospital in Constantinople, which was operated by the Imperial & Royal Foreign Ministry (30). Four weeks into the Great War, on the 24th August 1914, Dr. Amália Frisch was appointed staff physician of Ninth Rank-Class (*definitive Ärztin der IX. Rangsklasse*) (31). Although this was officially the lowest rank of the times, this appointment made her the first female 'academic' to be employed by the Austrian Foreign Ministry (32). After the culmination of the Balkan Wars in October 1913, she attended a course of Röntgen diagnostics in Vienna (33). From 1914 to 1918 Dr. Amália Frisch's name was also recorded in the Hungarian Official Registry as a Hungarian state employee (34,-38).

By 1914 Dr. Amália Frisch had become the medical director (*Leiterin*) of the Austro-Hungarian Hospital, which had moved to its new premises in the Pancaldi/Taxim district (Fig. 2). This was the most modern hospital in the capital (39); Amália had co-ordinated a campaign for its construction (40). Amália Frisch was instrumental in the expansion of the surgical facilities of the hospital (41). During the war, Amália visited Hungary in the summer of 1916, and went to her father's native town of Esztergom. She was welcomed as an accomplished personality from the diaspora coming to visit relatives.



Figure 1. Dr. Amália Frisch, distinguished member of the Ottoman Society for the Protection of Women's rights (est. 1913)

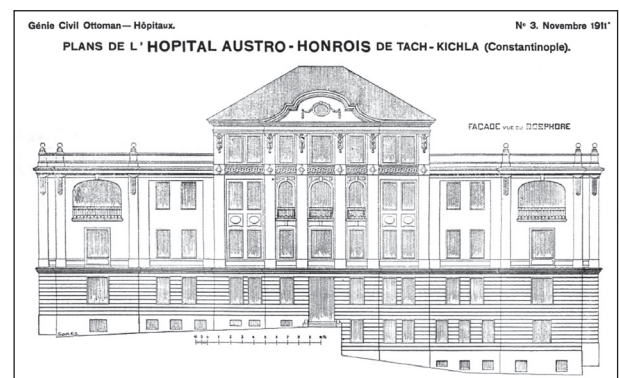


Figure 2. Austro-Hungarian Hospital of Istanbul (East façade)

Budapest

At the end of WWI the Austro-Hungarian Hospital in Istanbul was occupied by the French military administration and re-named 'Hôpital Franchet-d'Espèrey' after the name of the commander (42). All Austro-Hungarian officers and diplomatic corps serving in Turkey were deported on the 30th of November 1918, under the condition of the armistice. Amalia Frisch decided to leave for Hungary and arrived in Budapest via Vienna at the end of June 1919 (43). Amália's mother Fanny Frisch accompanied her on their return to Budapest (44), where they were received by their relatives. Following her official retirement from state service on the 1st of September 1919 (45), Amália Frisch was registered in the List of Physicians of Budapest on the 31st October 1919.

Amália Frisch does not seem to have been professionally active during her first years in Budapest. The Almanac and Address-Book of the Physicians of Hungary mentions her for the first time in its 1923 volume as:

Frisch Amália, Dr. Speciality: Stomatology and Dentistry. Diploma: Bern, 1907. Flat: Budapest V. district, Teréz circus 28 (46).

Dr. Amália Frisch joined the Royal Society of Budapest Physicians on the 5th October 1922, but the annals of the Society never mention her name again. She was compelled to alter her profession to dentistry, possibly due to the significant unemployment among doctors after the war. Her address and other details did not change until 1938, when her name was already missing from the Official Registry of the Hungarian National Medical Chamber (47).

Amália was occupied as a dentist-stomatologist until the end of the 1920s. She may have been assisted by her mother in their Budapest surgery. It is likely that she had mastered dentistry with her parents and received a certificate or permit from the Turkish health authorities. Her surgery was located on the first floor of a big tenement house at Teréz circus 28 (Telephone number: 195-29) (48,49). This must have provided Amalia for a modest life, who, again to the best of our knowledge, was not married.

Dr. Amália Frisch, passed away on January 20th 1941 at the Lipótmező (Leopold's field), State Psychiatry and Neurology Institute. She was 58-years old

and had lived under psychiatric control in the last decade of her life. Amália was diagnosed as 'schizophrenia' ('Serdüléses elmezavar': dementia praecox), yet the cause of her death is unknown.

Dr. Amália Frisch is buried in the Budapest Jewish Cemetery at Kozma Street. She had lived the zenith of her career in Istanbul during two wars – the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, and the First World War 1914-1918, and died in Budapest during the Second World War, only to be forgotten.

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