



## JOHANN “RUKELI” TROLLMANN

(Wilsche, Germany, 1907 – Wittenberge subcamp, Germany, 1944)

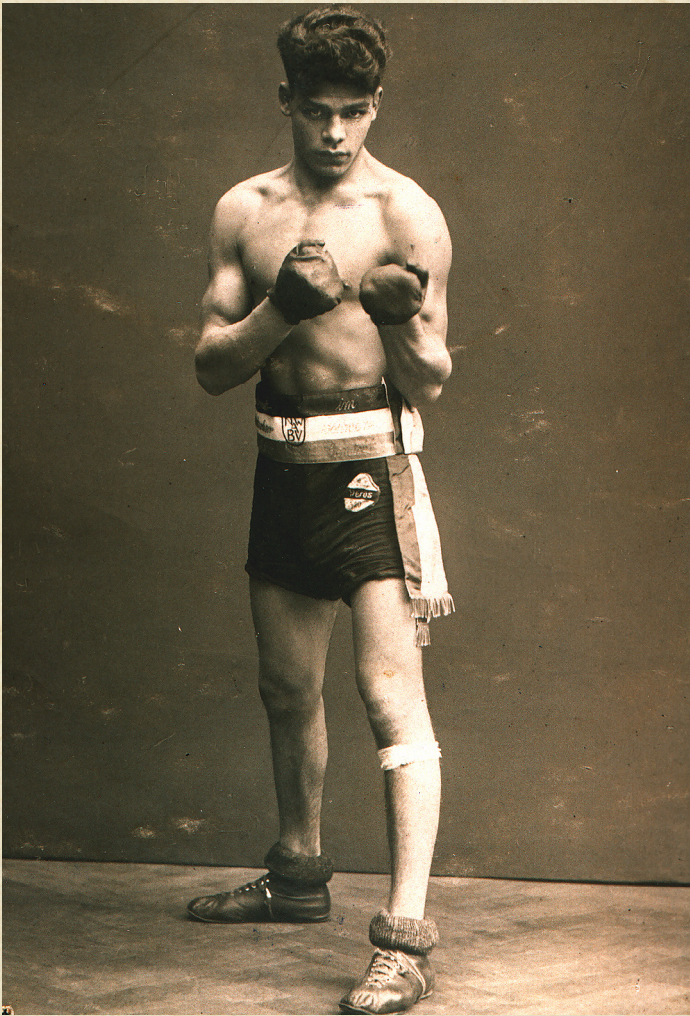


Image: Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma

Johann “Rukeli” Trollman was born in Wilsche, in Lower Saxony, in 1907. He was nicknamed “Rukeli” by his family, a term which comes from the Romani language meaning “tree”. **He started boxing in early life and developed a dynamic new fighting style.** In 1929, Rukeli Trollmann went to Berlin and began his career as a professional fighter.

In 1933, when the Nazis came to power, Trollmann, a Sinto, became increasingly exposed to the racial policies of discrimination and persecution. That same year, **he won the German championship title** in the light heavyweight category – his biggest success up to that point in his life. However, a few days later, owing to racism, **NS-Sports officials withdrew his title.**

Despite the championship being revoked, Trollmann’s manager was able to organise another big boxing match in Berlin. Before this match, **Trollman was severely pressured to fight in a “German way”:** during the game he should stand foot-to-

foot with his opponent in the middle of the ring and thus abandon his dynamic fighting style. Trollmann felt compelled to meet these demands. **He entered the ring with his hair dyed, and skin powdered white. This was his way of criticising Nazis racial ideology.** Trollmann lost the match. But he did not let himself be defeated without a fight against Nazi “racial policy”, and **courageously denounced it in public.**

Over the years 1933 – 1935, he fought in several other matches. However, he lost them all, or rather he had to lose them, because it was demanded of him by Nazi sports officials.

In 1935 he was expelled from the German Pugilism Association, which meant he was barred from practising his profession. After that, he ended up fighting at fairs. That same year he married Olga Frieda Bilda, and together they had one daughter, Rita.

In 1935, Trollmann was sent to a labour camp for the first time. **To escape further persecution, he went into hiding a number of times.** In the years 1935 to 1938, he kept his head above water with occasional work.



In 1939, he was enrolled into the army, and he considered himself temporarily immune from further persecution. In 1942, as a Sinto, he was released from the Wehrmacht (armed forces of Nazi Germany), and shortly after was sent to the Neuengamme concentration camp near Hamburg. Trollmann was killed in the Wittenberge subcamp in 1944.

Stolpersteine (stumbling stones) commemorate Trollmann in Hanover, Hamburg and Berlin. **In Kreuzberg, Berlin a plaque as well as the Johann-Trollmann-Boxcamp both commemorate the boxer.**

In his study, Michail Krausnick describes Rukeli Trollman's last fight: "Whether he was driven by anger, irony or despair, we don't know. But one thing's for sure: Johann Trollmann was brave enough to end his career by himself. And in front of everyone."<sup>1</sup>

#### **Sources and further information:**

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This biography has been written by the Educational Forum against Antigypsyism

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1. Krausnick, Michail: Wo sind sie hingekommen? Der unterschlagene Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma. Gerlingen 1995, S. 77 f.