

Civil Courage in Nazi Germany: Telling the Stories of the

Rossenstrasse Protestors

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Abstract

The Nazi regime is often characterized by its systemic persecution of Jewish people, but its policy relating to Jewish intermarriage and Mischlinge, children of these intermarried relationships, was inconsistent and legally ambiguous. Some Jewish men married to non-Jewish women were protected due to familial advocacy and fear of public backlash, while others faced escalating discrimination, particularly with the passing of the Nuremberg laws, which prohibited new intermarriages. In 1943, the Gestapo began to arrest intermarried Jewish men, leading to their wives protesting to free their husbands at what is now known as the Rosenstrasse protest. In a rare and significant example of successful protest in Nazi Germany, this culminated in the release of their detained husbands. The Rosenstrasse protest is often overlooked in Holocaust scholarship, and this project aims to address that through genealogical research by finding archival records, such as birth and death certificates, on databases such as [Ancestry.com](#), JewishGen, and Arolsen Archives. These documents are analyzed to write biographies about their lives, which are stored in a database where descendants and others can learn and contribute to this research. Through analyzing these individuals' lives, it highlights the way ordinary people faced oppression, through surviving and resisting the Nazi regime.

Methods

- The research process begins by identifying a protestor in the Rosenstrasse Foundation's master database, which also includes the person's address, spouse, and any previous research conducted.
- From here, I looked through databases like Ancestry.com and JewishGen for birth, death, and marriage certificates that match the person's already known information.
- When searching for candidates on databases, it is important to include their location, birth and death year, and try different spellings of their name since documents were often handwritten and could have been misspelled or phonetically spelled.
- If no information is found, likely that it might not be available yet, so the best step is to move on to another person and repeat the process until genealogical documents are found.
- Once information is found, analytical work is done using the translating software, DeepL, to analyze their life and then write a biography of the candidate's life.
- This biography then goes through an editing process by the Rosenstrasse Foundation for grammatical and historical accuracy, and is then posted on their website and database.

Results

The results of this research were able to find some genealogical documents on Irmgard Sander and her family; however, some results are preliminary, as her death certificate or information on her child, Ruth-Regina Sander, were not found. However, her marriage certificate, and her husband's birth and death certificates were able to give more information about their life and led to the discovery of refugee applications submitted to France by the Sanders. Along with this, various documents verified their arrests, but couldn't provide much information, as they were just their name. Using DeepL to translate these documents into English, their occupations and education provide good insight into their lives. This led to the creation of her biography and highlights her life's similarity to ours, until the Jewish persecution in Germany and her protest against that. These documents were hard to find, as it took multiple searches of similar keywords to finally reveal these key documents. It also required having to sift through people with the same name and cross-referencing to ensure all the information was correct. Once more research is done and more documents are found, they will be able to gain further insight into her life and illuminate her biography.

Background

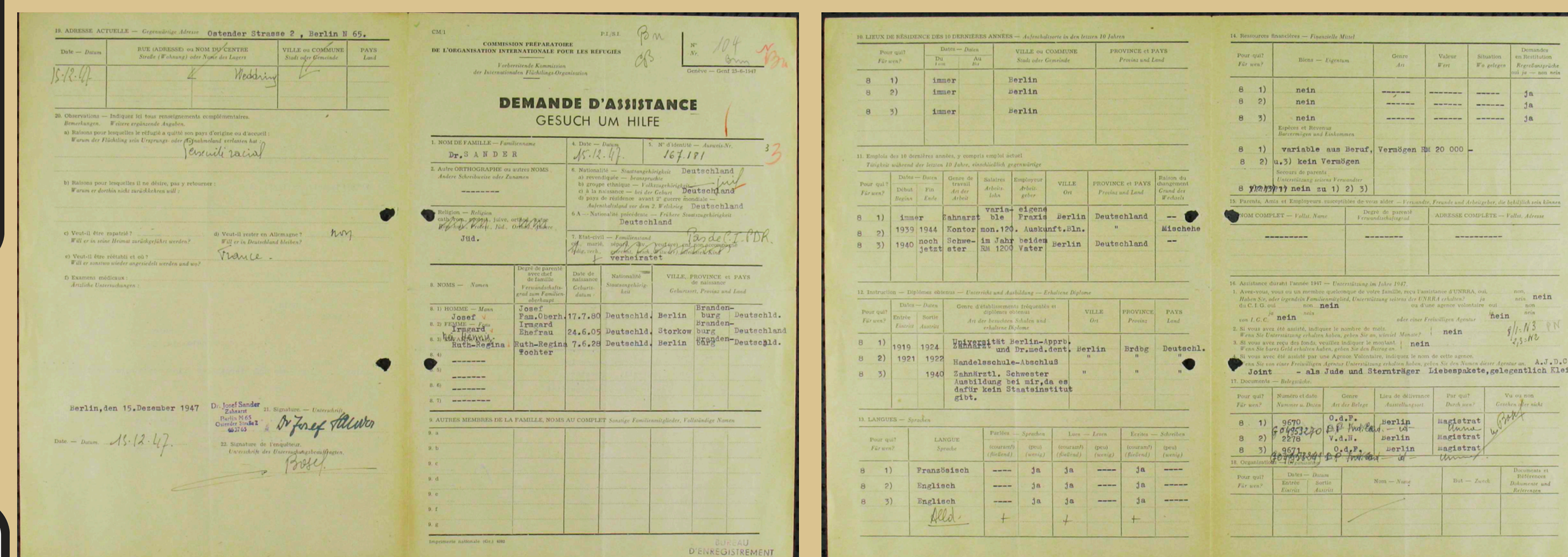
In the 1930s, the Nazi party took power over Germany, forcing Jews into ghettos and concentration camps. During this time, intermarried Jews were often a complex topic within Nazi law, and often gave Jewish men married to Aryan women privileges other Jews didn't have. However, in 1943, the Gestapo began to kidnap around 1,800 Jewish husbands and forced them into a detention building on Rosenstrasse in Berlin. To combat this, around 6,000 Aryan wives of these men protested the detainment of their husbands in the Rosenstrasse protest in front of the SS soldiers. After a week of protesting, the men were finally freed, leading to the first successful protest in Nazi Germany. To honor these brave women, the Rosenstrasse Foundation was formed in 2018 with the mission of commemorating, educating, and encouraging civil courage, or the actions that everyday people take to defend against oppression and human rights violations. A part of this foundation is the use of biographies to educate about the lives of these women and about how their lives were before they risked their lives to protest for their husbands. This database will also serve as a way for descendants of these protestors to learn about their families' stories.

Biography



References

- Josef Sander. *Marriage Certificate*. 11 May 1927. Landesarchiv Berlin [Berlin, Germany, Marriages, 1874-1944 - AncestryLibrary.com](#)
- Josef Sander. *Death Certificate*. 17 July 1880. Landesarchiv Berlin [Berlin, Germany, Deaths, 1874-1985 - AncestryLibrary.com](#)
- Person Record for *Irmgard Sander*. Arolsen Archives, Arolsen Archives Online Collection, [Search for documents in the Arolsen Archives](#)
- Stoltzfus, Nathan, and Birgit Maier-Katkin, editors. *Protest in Hitler's "National Community": Popular Unrest and the Nazi Response*. Berghahn Books, 2015.
- Stoltzfus, Nathan, *Dissent in Nazi Germany*, The Atlantic Monthly Group LLC, Sept. 1992



Figures 1 and 2: The following images show a request to seek refuge in France by Irmgard and Josef Sander

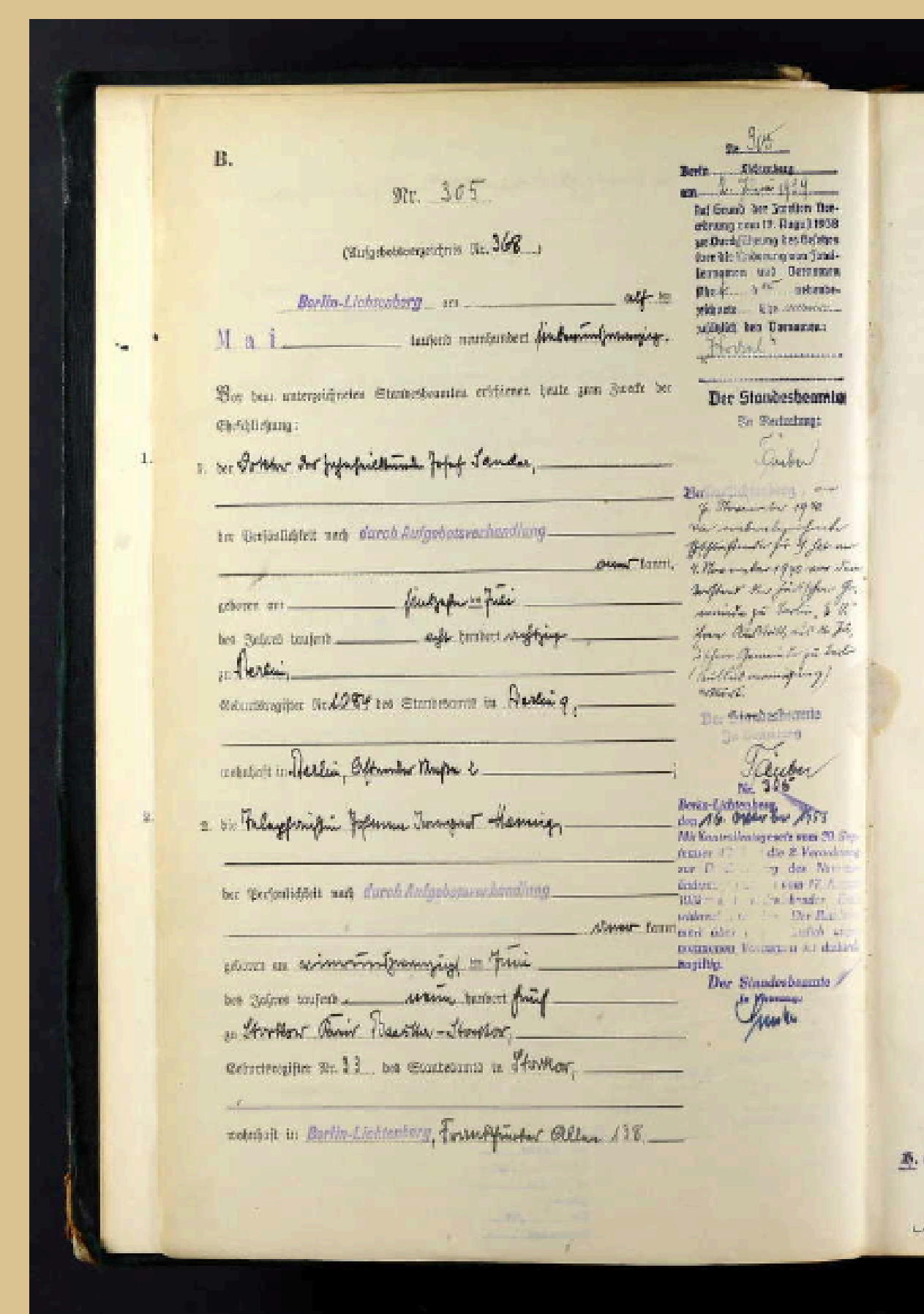


Figure 3: Marriage certificate between Josef and Irmgard Sander

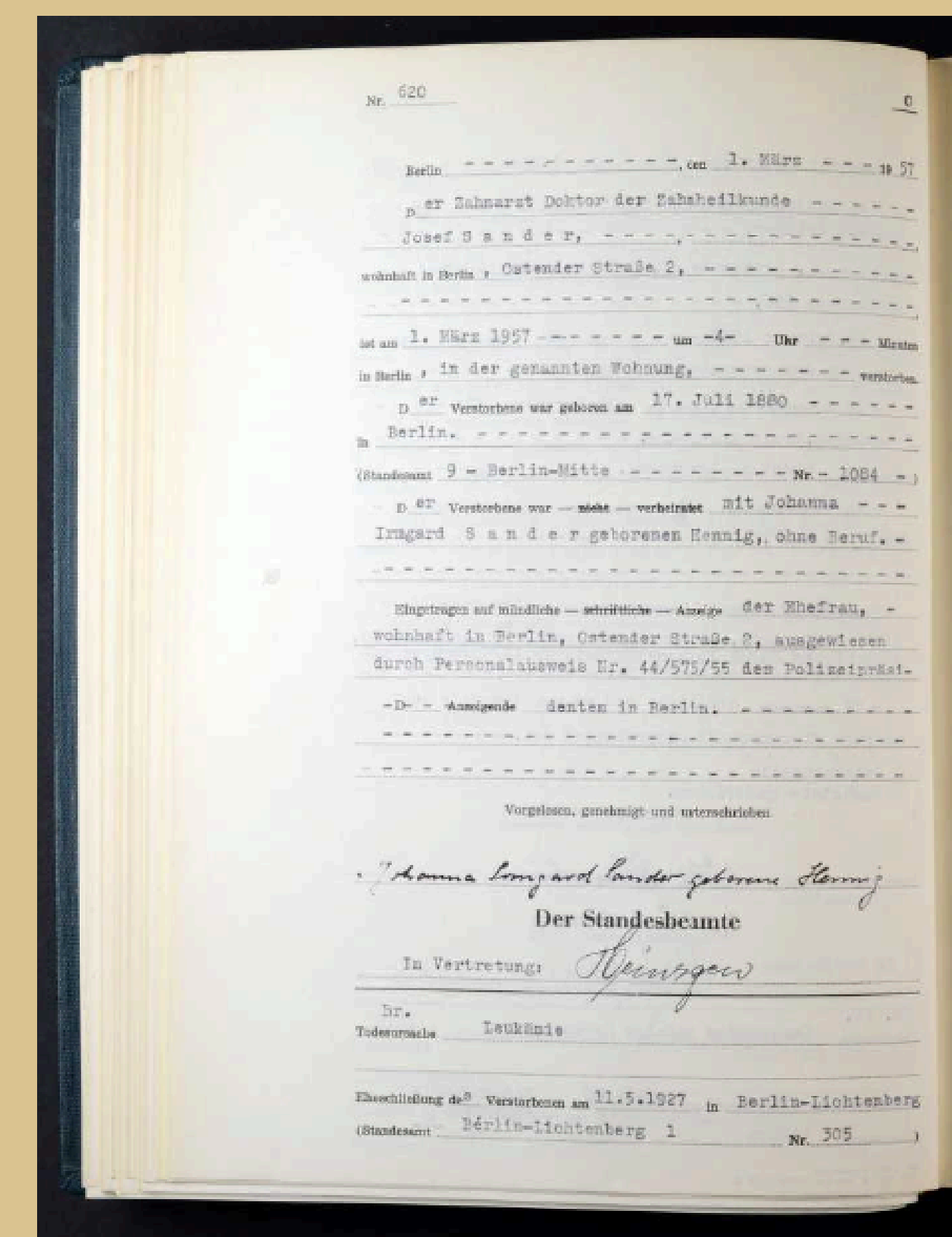


Figure 4: Death Certificate for Josef Sander