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Dora's Origins

Dora most likely born youngest child of Markus/Morduch and Emma-Esther Gordin, in the port of Libau/Liepaja/Libava in June 1895 in what was then the province of Kurland/Kurzeme in the Russian Empire of the last Tsar Nicholas II (reigned 1894-1917). She had three elder siblings: Anna/Hannah, Nikolai/Naftal and Leopold/Leonid – all born in Libau where Markus and Emma had been living from the late 1870's. Markus's family came from Dunaborg/Dvina/Dvinsk – now in far eastern part of Latvia (sometimes part of Russia, late 1790's-1918 and then Poland, 1919-39). Emma's from major Lithuanian city of Kovno/Kaunas (part of Russia from mid 18th Century to 1918).

In the 1930's Dora and her brother Leopold referred to their father as Russian and Jewish and their mother as Latvian and Jewish.

Living in Paris between 1924 and 1929 Dora told the French authorities she was Estonian and she had an Estonian passport (family had lived in Reval/Tallinn capital of Imperial Russian Province of Estland from 1912; in November 1918 it became the capital of the new state of Estonia – creation underpinned by British military support).

At the time she had her first solo exhibition in the UK, at the Leicester Galleries, London in October 1928, Dora insisted to reporters she was 'Russian', forced to flee her native land by the tyranny of the Bolsheviks. She gave the impression her family had owned land near St. Petersburg and in Finland; her father was a cultured architect part of the Russian intelligentsia – possibly shot by the Bolsheviks for refusing to hand over money. She claimed her family had been scattered to the winds by the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 and she did not know their present whereabouts (she knew full well mother, sister Anna and brother Nikolai were in Tallinn while Leopold, after graduating as a civil engineer from Edinburgh University in June 1922 was living in Pimlico, 5 miles south of Leicester Square!).

A decade later, November 1938, as here third solo show at the Leicester Galleries was about to open, Dora stated that her father had been Russian of Scottish descent (his ancestor had been a Gordon who had come to work for Catherine The Great in the late 18th Century as an architect in St. Petersburg (drawing upon Leopold's time in Edinburgh where he studied 1912-14 and then 1921-22?). No hint whatsoever to the British press that her parents had both been Jewish; by the late 1940's her imagination had gone into overdrive. She told her favourite founder Morris Singer that her father had been a General in the Imperial Russian Army, and her mother a Princess related to the Romanovs).

Dora's First Marriage:

1916-18: Dora briefly married to shadowy figure – Vladimir Rolov or Rolof, a Russian-Jewish businessman based in the Latvian port of Wenden/Ventspils, up the coast north of Libau. She was later to claim she had no formal training as a sculptor – rubbish: 1915-17 she trained alongside her friend from Libau sculptor Nathalie Mei in Petrograd and then Helsinki.

Meanwhile, brother Leopold turned up in Tallinn mid-1918 having escaped as an officer from imprisonment by the Bolsheviks and walked all the way from Tashkent). He fought against the Red Army on the side of Estonian Nationalist forces, then June 1919 moved to join the White Russian North-Western Army under General NN Yudenitch. Revealing that his English was sufficiently fluent for Leopold to work as a translator/liaison officer between the White Russians and the British Military Mission in Tallinn – hint Dora worked for a while as a nurse attached to a hospital equipped by the BMM in Tallinn. Later Dora was speak enthusiastically about the majesty and might of the British Empire – she felt privileged to belong to it by marriage (her first to an Englishman, Dr. George Garlick of the Malay Medical Service in 1930; her pride in British military, political and economic strength was quoted in July 1933).

Yudenitch's White Army attacked from Estonian territory in October 1919, made startling initial progress towards Petrograd but was then stopped by weight of numbers of the Red Army. After a month it was forced to retreat back into Estonia where it was disarmed and disbanded. January 1920: Leopold left Tallinn for London via Stockholm (autumn of 1920 he married English woman Elsie Roberts then took the final year of his engineering degree at Edinburgh, 1921-22). No doubt Dora an anglophile but why did she not follow Leopold?

Dora appears to have been divorced from Rolov by the time she began regularly exhibiting in Tallinn between November 1920-22.

She then disappears for a couple of years – autumn 1924 surfaces in Paris, arrived via Berlin, studying a course in French Civilisation at the Sorbonne and living in a hall of residence for single women on the Bvd Raspail a short walk from the heart of ultra-fashionable Montparnasse (neighbours included: Andre Breton; Jacques Lipschitz; Chana Orloff; Ossip Zadkine; Maurice Gromaire; Fernand Leger; Mondrian; the women who founded *Marie Claire* magazine).

She quickly displayed a dazzling talent for net-working (long before this term was coined). She sought out the leading French sculptor of the day, Aristide Maillol, and wrung a fulsome endorsement from him (well that was what Dora claimed) while she also met and impressed: Antoine Bourdelle, Charles Despiau, Joseph Bernard and Francois Pompon (who in 1925 invited her to exhibit with the prestigious Salon de Tuileries launched in 1923).

Dora was soon across the channel, exercising her charisma: by the autumn of 1927 she was friendly with much of the Bloomsbury Group via its travel agency run in part

by David Gourlay (Dora would stay with Gourlay's fiancée Janet Vaughan at 19 Taviton Street). Vaughan was entrée to Virginia and Leonard Woolf as daughter of Margaret Virginia's closest friend before the First World War and model for the character of 'Sally Seaton' in *Mrs Dalloway* published in 1925. Also entrée to Dora's future third husband, the Hon Richard Hare – part of an aristocratic Anglo-Irish family and second son of the 4th Earl of Listowel. He had been a student at Rugby under Vaughan's father William. The Hares were immensely wealthy with property in central London (Knightsbridge, Manchester and Bryanston Squares) and in the south of Ireland [Waterford] which they had to abandon after the creation of the southern Irish Free State early in 1922.

Dora worked on Gourlay and Vaughan to persuade the Leicester Galleries to give her a solo show which it did in October 1928. A friend of Vaughan's father was collector and industrialist Samuel Courtauld; he bought a cast of Dora's *Mongolian Head* and then promptly donated it to the Tate so it was on display there by the end of 1928. Another friend of William Vaughan was educationalist, collector and Master of University College, Oxford, Sir Michael Sadler. He appears to have encouraged his friend Professor Alec Fraser to persuade the British Colonial office in 1929 to buy a cast of Dora's *Walking Male Torso* (modelled by a white Russian Cossack/circassian in exile in Paris) to be placed outside the Library of the new Prince of Wales University College, Achimota, the Gold Coast (now Ghana) of which Fraser was the first Principal.

In 1929 she persuaded the leading French architect, Auguste Perret, to design her a modernist maison-atelier for 21 Rue du Belvedere in Boulogne-sur-Seine. While it was still being built she left for Singapore and British Malaya. She arrived in January 1930, by September of the same year she was married to Dr. George Garlick (Deputy Head of Medical Services for the Unfederated Malay State of Johor and a close friend of the State's Sultan Ibrahim ibn abu Bakr) and had been offered a commission by Singapore's Municipal Commissioners to provide bronzes for the interior of the city's new Town Hall. The Commission was settled in February 1931: for \$10,000 Sinagaporean (about 1,000 guineas) Dora would make 5 portrait heads in bronze of the various races composing the peoples of British Malaya. The Sultan of Johor gave her a studio made from attap palm leaves in the grounds of his own palace at Johor Bahru.

By mid-1935 she installed: two Chinese heads (1 male and 1 female), 1 Javanese; 1 Tamil Indian and 1 Malay (female) in the first and second floor landings of the new Town Hall. A last minute addition was another cast of *Walking Male Torso* for the main entrance hall of the Town Hall.

Using her status as a British subject she was able to travel with relative ease in French Indo China (visited Angkor Wat in western Cambodia); the Dutch East Indies (Borobudhur temple complex on Java, later Bali); Siam/Thailand and from there to

the Shan and Katchin states in eastern Burma along the Thai border. Later accompanied husband Garlick to Shanghai and then Peking where he spoke at a medical conference. She had time to have another solo show at the Leicester Galleries in July 1933. She tried but failed to persuade Edwin Lutyens, Charles Holden and Eric Mendelsohn to commission public works from her for building projects they were working on (RC Cathedral for Liverpool; London University Library and the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea: Lutyens wanted CS Jagger; Holden wanted Epstein or Henry Moore and Mendelsohn wanted Frank Dobson).

She rarely had much to say about British sculpture but during this period c. 1933-35 she was disdainfully dismissive, even anti-Semitic, in her remarks about Epstein (possibly because her portrait work was sometimes compared to and contrasted with his). She did not have any positive words for Henry Moore or Hepworth. She tended to be much more enthusiastic about leading established sculptors who were not producing anything too 'eccentric and experimental' such as Havard Thomas (safely dead since 1921); Gilbert Bayes; Gilbert Ledward; Alfred Hardiman; Sir William Reid Dick (President of the RBS) – along with two female sculptor-friends: Hazel Armour and Dora Clarke. Interesting that between 1942-1955: Reid Dick, Wheeler and Ledward proposed and seconded Dora to be elected an ARA – but she never attracted more than 3 additional votes. So there were distinct limits how even with her networking wizardry Dora could progress in the British art world of the day.

June 1935: Dora left Johor State arrived in London early July 1935 and began divorce proceedings from Dr. Garlick. Process speeded up by Garlick agreeing the marriage had never been consummated (though he had three children from his first marriage and would have three with the Anglo-Chinese woman he married in 1937).

Dora asked Richard Hare to buy her a plot of land on which he and she (which really meant she) would design her dream studio-home. This became Dorich House which was inhabitable just in time for Dora's marriage to Richard at Chelsea Registry Office early in November 1936 (about a week after her divorce from Dr. Garlick came through).

The first articles about Dorich began to appear from January 1937; Dora used the house to draw influential people to visit her and inspect her latest sculptures. One such was Harry Goodhart Rendel, President of the RIBA. He asked her to make a portrait head of RIBA benefactor Sir Harry Vanderpant (Mayor of Westminster). This would be placed inside the new RIBA building on Portland Place, largely paid for by a donation from Vanderpant. Goodhart-Rendel was so impressed by the portrait Dora produced he asked her to make one of himself to accompany Vanderpant's head inside the Florence Hall on the first floor of the RIBA Building where they remain to this day, flanking the entrance.

Meanwhile, while sitting to Dora for his portrait Vanderpant decided to buy a cast of Dora's *Seated Baby* (2-year-old Bonny Baby Verena Dawnay) to adorn the interior of

one of Vanderpant's pet projects: Westminster City Council's new Maternity and Child Welfare Centre on Bessborough Street, Pimlico (building unveiled by Queen Elizabeth in November 1937; Vanderpant unveiled *Seated Baby* inside on 20 May 1938).

The news of these commissions could only help raise Dora's profile and early in April 1938, at the urging of its President Sir William Reid Dick (impressed after a visit to Dorich in 1937), Dora was elected an Associate of the RBS at the same time as: Eric Gill; Frank Dobson and Maurice Lambert.

November 1938: Dora had another sell out solo show at the Leicester Galleries. From this time she began putting out the claim that her father's family had originally been Scottish, 'Gordon', descended from an architect who worked in St. Petersburg for Catherine the Great (reigned: 1762-1796) in the 1770's. Critics did their best to place her within British Art – a female equivalent to Frank Dobson as standard bearer for the opulent figuration of Maillol? An outside akin to Epstein who felt naturally, inexorably, drawn to exotic subjects? [Dora did not care for this otherwise flattering comparison one bit – could be snidely dismissive of JE, even anti-Semitic in tone]. Her portraiture different to but related to: Lady Kennet (Kathleen Bruce, then Scot then Young); Freda Lady Foress; Dora Middleton Clark; Hazel Armour (Kennedy by marriage) and Phoebe Stabler (Dora did indeed know the last three named, having met them in Paris c. spring of 1925).

In November 1938 Goodhart-Rendel was inspired to suggest that a group of Dora's admirers (included GR; Reid Dick; leading art critic DS MacColl; Eric Maclagen of the V&A; Sir Alec Martin Chairman of *Sotheby's*) club together to buy a cast of *Walking Male Torso* to donate it to London University for installation inside Holden's new Senate House Library complex on Malet Street, Bloomsbury. GR even took Holden for a tour around Dora's show before it closed at the end of November 1938. On Holden's positive comment the gift was accepted and the cast was placed in the Lift Hall of Senate House Library late in April 1939 (where it remained until July 1940 when moved into storage; back on display from late 1940's to late 1960's when moved out of sight (Richard Hare had seen it in the Lift Hall in September 1964; removed spring of 1969 after an 'incident' involving some 'protesting' students). I last saw this beautiful cast in 2007 in the Classical Archaeology Dept. at SH being used as a prop for productions of plays in ancient Greek).

At the outbreak of WWII, in September 1939, Richard returned to the Foreign Office and then seconded to the Foreign Publicity Division of the Ministry of Information. Even with Dora's networking magic her influence now only reached so far with the British powers that be. Tried twice to be appointed an official war artist with Clark's WAAC within the MoI but unsuccessful (Clark did agree to sit to her for a portrait head, 1943-45; he liked it so much he did not give it to the National Gallery on his stepping down as Director in the summer of 1945).

1944: Dora was commissioned by sinologist Lord Ailwyn and British United Aid for China to make a bas-relief portrait plaque in honour of Chinese Nationalist leader and briefly first President of the Chinese Republic in 1912, Sun Yat Sen (1866-1925). This would be set into a brick wall in Warwick Court, on the edge of Gray's Inn, the site of house where Sun had lived in London studying British Democracy in 1896-97. Dora recommended to Ailwyn by their mutual friend leading collector and Orientalist George Eumorfopoulos while Dora's brother-in-law, William Listowel was on the committee for BUAC. Bronze plaque unveiled by Cultural Attache of the Chinese Nationalist Embassy in London on 5 May 1946. Three years later (October 1949 Chinese Communists captured Peking and Sun's protégé as leader of the Nationalists, Chiang-kai-shek, fled to Taiwan – Dora's fine effort remains the only public memorial to Sun in the UK).

Next public project, 1946-47, could not have been more different: *Crowing Glory* a pioneering 'trade symbol' (what we would call today a logo) for the Eugene Permanent Wave Co: bronze figure of seated young woman toying with her hair reminiscent of some of Dora's studies of female Balinese temple dancers from c. 1934-35. Full-sized seated bronze figure was launched with much publicity in the Ideal Home Exhibition's Hall of Beauty in March 1947. Fifth full sized plastic replicas were produced to sit in the display windows of lady's hairdressers who used Eugene's permanent wave process.

Before Dora left with Richard for the USA in late October 1947 (Richard had a research fellowship at Stanford University), she finished an exuberant life-sized figure of a *Happy Baby*. Model was Jasmina Hamzavi, only daughter of the press attache at the Iranian Embassy in London who was married to model and former deb of the year Cella 'Jo the Lips' Crankshaw. Plaster cast of the baby had been seen at Dorich by Mrs. Rosalie Holmes, chairwoman of the Holloway Prison Visitors Committee who had been introduced to Dora by architect James Walford (whose wife Diana sat to Dora for a portrait head in 1944). Mrs. Holmes asked Dora to make a second cast, in a bright shining bronze patina, for the prisons planned Mother and Baby Unit (the first in any UK prison). The baby was installed in the prison late in 1949.

Shortly after they arrived at Stanford, Dora left Richard researching a book and headed for Hollywood. She soon had a studio in downtown LA and had attracted at least two portrait commissions – one a semi-public one in the form of a portrait head of pioneering businesswoman Mrs. Ruth Kalbus Kerr – widow of Alexander Kerr who had invented the screw top bottle who had become CEO of the Kerr Glass Manufacturing and Bottling company of LA after his death in 1925. The head was cast on Dora and Richard's return to Dorich in September 1948; within a year it was on display outside the entrance to Mrs Kerr's office in LA. On her death in 1967 Mrs Kerr donated the head in her will to be displayed in perpetuity inside the main hall of

Westmont College in Santa Barbara, the Liberal arts College Kerr had been instrumental in establishing in 1937.

In 1953 Dora's friend and neighbour Lady Dame Leila Paget (1881-1958), living at Warren House with her ex-diplomat husband Sir Ralph, commissioned her to make a bronze low-relief portrait plaque of the Serbian Royalist Cetnik leader General Dragoljub Draza Mihailovic (1893-1946). Lady Paget was a hero of the First World War in Serbia – she had led an ambulance team there in 1914-15. She was a prominent supporter of Mihailovic in the UK during WWII, though in May 1944 Churchill shifted British backing to Tito and his Communist partisans. Isolated the general was defeated by the Communists in the brief Yugoslavian Civil War of 1945-46 and shot on Tito's orders after a show trial in Belgrade in July 1946. In 1953 Lady Paget was disgusted by warming diplomatic relations between Britain and Tito – he had been invited to visit London by the Queen – and this prompted her to ask Dora to make a 'British tribute' to Mihailovic which had been to date sadly lacking. Shortly after the plaque was shown off in Warren House in mid-June 1955 it was installed inside St. Sava's Serbian Orthodox Church, Ladbroke Grove, London (it faces a display case containing medals the King of Yugoslavia awarded Lady Paget for her nursing exploits in 1915-15 after the end of the First World War – which led to the creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia).

As Dora was working on impressively gnarled and bearded face of General Mihailovic she displayed her virtuosity and variety by modelling the sensitive and intimate *Mother and Child* – modelled early in 1954 by Mrs. Ann John of East Molesey and her daughter Bella. One cast was exhibited at the RA in May 1954 where it was admired by Dora Russell (1894-1986). Ex-wife of Lord Bertrand Russell (divorced in 1935), she had worked for Richard Hare in the Anglo-Russian Relations division of the Mol, 1944-45 (when Richard had been Deputy Director, March 1944-April 1945 then Director, May 1945-March 1946). She had recently been elected to the International Committee of Mother's for Disarmament and Against War and was looking for a symbol for the organisation's HQ on the Unter den Linden in West Berlin. Dora agreed to make a new cast (the one exhibited in 1954 had been purchased by a Wimbledon optician who for many years thereafter displayed the sculpture in the window of his shop) and that the Committee could use it as their symbol. The bronze of *Mother and Child* was installed in the entrance lobby of the Committee's offices by July 1956. It remained there until the Committee broke up early in 1958 when Russell left it to be a founder member of the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament (Dora would not agree to CND using her *Mother and Child* for publicity purposes – perhaps because she suspected the CND of being a front for the Soviet KGB).

[Mid 1956 painter Orovida Pissarro (1893-1968) commissioned Dora to make a bronze head of her father Lucien (1863-1944: founder member in 1911 of the Camden Town Group and of the Monarro Group in 1920 – to be displayed in the

Pissarro Room of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Dora had met Orovida and her father in London in October 1928 at Dora's solo exhibition. The head was presented late in June 1957 but Dora was livid when she subsequently discovered the Pissarro Room would contain but one sculpture – a bust of Lucien's father, Camille. Orovida apologised to the Ashmolean's Keeper of Art for Dora's behaviour – with her melodramatic Russian temper ... she was her own worst enemy.']

Early 1957 Dora was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts she had made a portrait head of its long-time Vice-President architect Oswald Milne in 1938 (donated on his death in 1968 to the Society and on display for many years in the Society's Boardroom). Through the society she was offered a commissioned for a large, 7ft high x 5ft wide bronze relief for inside the Admin Block of a new Esso Petroleum Refinery at Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire (early 1960 the Company asked Professor RY Goodden of the RSA to recommend half a dozen of its members who were sculptors for the project. One was Dora, she got to a short list of three (along with David Wynne and Mark Batten) and was awarded the commission in mid-July 1960 for her design inspired by the theme of *Power*. Dora declared, early in 1961, that the panel had been conceived as a: 'tribute to the men who built and those who operate the new plant ...' She: 'set out to express the idea of oil as a great modern source of power, fluidity and movement ... linked with the human form, with human beings whose needs are being served by this refinement of crude energy.'

The panel was unveiled by Prince Philip on 3 November 1960. He could be relied upon to make some sceptical remarks concerning the artistic veracity of the construction worker's 'Stakhanovite bottom.' The refinery at Fawley, Milford Haven, the country's largest well into the 1970, was demolished in the late 1980's. The panel was rescued and is now to be seen inside the Milford Haven Heritage and Maritime Museum.

Dora's last major public commission grew from her connection with the RSA: early in 1962 she was commissioned by pioneering radiologist and member of the RSA council Sir David Smithers (1908-1995) to devise a large work [would prove one of her largest ever bronzes, 3.5 ft high and 8 feet in length] to adorn the entrance area of the new Royal Marsden Cancer Hospital, Sutton, Surrey – of which he was the first Director (1963-1973). Dora suggested a seated mother playing with her young male child, conceived as a 'symbol of love and confidence, health, protection and happiness ... to welcome, comfort, relieve and cure.' Dora's conviction which she shared with Sir David, was that such a positive work at the new hospital's entrance would only encourage patients and their families to feel more optimistic as to their fates – if they faced treatment with hope it would be all the more effective in practice (well that was the theory). Something of an apogee for Dora when the figure was unveiled by no less than the Queen on 20 May 1963.

A year later another cast of the work was commissioned for the entrance lobby of the new Indianapolis Museum of Art in the USA. This was installed and unveiled in September 1964.

Dora appears to have felt with the success of *Mother and Child* that orders for further public sculpture would come rolling in; early in 1966 ICI expressed interest in a figure modelled by grand-daughter of one of the firm's founders. However, this came to naught as Dora never recovered from sudden and unexpected death, in September 1966 at the age of only 59, of her husband Richard from a heart attack at Dorich. Dora was, by now, aged around 70 and her eyesight was beginning to fail her. She did not produce any further original work after 1972. Interviewed on Radio 4 in August that year she claimed with some justice that hers had not been an orthodox career as a public artist but that her work was imbued with her deep love for 'England' and its people; a love all the fiercer as the British had given her a new home in which she could work and thrive when her birth-country had turned against her and all the values she cherished. (This was also the last occasion during which she hinted at a birth date – about 1909, knocking about 14 years off her true age).

She was delighted she lived long enough to see the Soviet Union vote itself out of existence – on 25 December 1991; she died at Dorich four days later from a massive stroke. The obituarists agreed she was a talented sculptor of international renown but despite their best efforts much of their statements as to her precise origins were inaccurate – she had covered her tracks well.