



# ALWAYS HUNGARIAN

Hungarian Jewry through  
the Vicissitudes of the Modern Era

Editors: Guy Miron • Shlomo Spitzer • Anna Szalai



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Bar-Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan

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Viktória Bányai<sup>1</sup>

**JEWISH CHILDREN AND JEWISH SCHOOLS  
IN HUNGARY AFTER THE HOLOCAUST, 1945–1948**

The large-scale destruction and enormous losses suffered by Hungarian Jewry, especially those in the countryside, has long dwarfed the story of the very few surviving children and the handful of surviving childcare and educational institutions. Thus, relatively little has been written on the experiences of Jewish children in the immediate postwar period Hungary. My research was part of a comprehensive project of the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah in Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research to explore Hungarian Jewry between the years 1945 and 1957. It included the following topics: children's homes, orphans' care, Jewish schools, religious education, organizations working with children and summer camps. In the two-year period of research, I discovered several new sources in both state archives and in collections of the Jewish communities; I also made use of contemporary press and memoirs. The paper will focus on some aspects of this research project, with special emphasis on the history of Jewish schools in this short and eventful period of three and a half school years until the nationalization of all the denominational elementary schools in the summer of 1948.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 The author is a senior research fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies, Institute for Minority Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest. E-mail: banyai.viktoria@hebraisztika.hu. The research was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
- 2 The full version of this paper was published in the volume edited by Sharon Kangisser Cohen, *"My Homesickness Drove me Home..." Jewish Life in Postwar Hungary*. Jerusalem 2018.

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As a result of the Holocaust, in 1945 in Hungary there were hardly any Jewish families left intact by the war. A large number of surviving children had lost one or both parents and many members of their extended families – grandparents, cousins, etc. Even those family members still alive were, in many cases, unfit for bringing up children, for financial and/or psychological reasons.<sup>3</sup> In 1941 the 0-19 cohort consisted of 60,132 children in the countryside and 29,042 children in Budapest, while in 1946 there were only 7,566 in the countryside (that is 87.5% lower than the number five years earlier) and 13,184 (55% lower) in Budapest.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that on the one hand the decrease is the result of the impact of migration, and on the other hand our data are to some extent distorted by not comparing those cohorts born in the same year, but those beyond their 19th birthday were replaced by those born in the meantime. The birth rate, which had been steadily declining already in the interwar years, plummeted during the war – that is, the potential members of the youngest cohort of 1946 were not only dead, but many of them had never even been born.<sup>5</sup>

## Jewish Schools in the Countryside

The number of children clearly shows what is also corroborated by sources in statistics and the history of education: there were very few towns in Hungary where enough children aged 6-10 survived for a functioning Jewish school. In the countryside, only 15 towns reopened their Jewish schools. Most of these were among the towns whose Jews had (at least in part) been deported to Strasshof near Vienna and made to work in local industrial and agricultural plants.<sup>6</sup> Children were taken to Strasshof from four ghettos in Hungary: those

- 3 Viktor Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők: Fejezetek a magyar zsidóság szociológiájából 1945 után*, Budapest 2002, p. 89.
- 4 Zsidó Világkongresszus Magyarországi Képviselőte és az Amerikai Joint Distribution Committee Statisztikai Osztályának Közleményei [Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress and American JDC, Statistical Department, Bulletin] 10, 1948, pp. 3-4.
- 5 Zsigmond Pál Pach, “A magyarországi zsidóság mai statisztikájának szembevető jelenségei” [Statistical Survey of Contemporary Hungarian Jewry], in Imre Benoschofsky (ed.), *Maradék-zsidóság. A magyarországi zsidóság 1945-46-ban*, Budapest 1947, pp. 22-32.
- 6 Kinga Frojimovics and Éva Kovács, “Jews in a ‘Judenrein’ City: Hungarian Jewish Slave Laborers in Vienna (1944-1945)”, *Hungarian Historical Review* 4, 3 (2015), pp. 705-736.

## Jewish Children and Jewish Schools in Hungary after the Holocaust, 1945-48

of Baja, Debrecen, Szeged and Szolnok. The geographic distribution of Jewish schools in the countryside after the war reflects this fact: most of them were located in the Alföld and Hajdúság region – the catchment areas of these ghettos. Most of Hungarian Jewry outside Budapest was deported to Auschwitz in the spring and summer of 1944. In those communities, hardly anyone under the age of 14 survived.

Table 1: **Jewish schools in the countryside in the 1946/47 school year**<sup>7</sup>

	Town	Number of students	Number of teachers	Headmaster / Teachers
<b>Alföld and Hajdúság region</b>	Békéscsaba (Orthodox)	82	2	
	Debrecen (Orthodox)	220	6	Mrs. Miksa Almási
	Debrecen (Status quo)	198	14	Ernő Steier Dezső Gábor
	Deszk (Tarbut School)	110	3	Ferenc Szabó Márton Reichmann
	Hajdúnánás (Orthodox)	60	2	
	Hódmezővásárhely (Neolog)	41	2	László Gruber
	Karcag (Orthodox)	26	2	Ignác Ausländer
	Kiskunhalas (Orthodox)	30	2	Anna Lusztig née Neubauer
	Makó (Orthodox)	99	4	
	Szarvas (Orthodox and Neolog)	24	1	
	Szeged (Neolog)	165	9	Alfréd Székely Jenő Grünfeld
Szolnok (Neolog)	50	1		
<b>“Exceptions”</b>	Miskolc (Orthodox)	17	2	Júlia Herczeg née Schwartz
	Nyíregyháza (Orthodox and Status quo)	46	3	
	Csorna (Orthodox)	80	1	Miksa Sichermann
	Pécs (Neolog)	60	2	Ernő Péter, Márta Bóhm

7 Zsidó Világkongresszus Magyarországi képviselete és az Amerikai Joint Distribution Committee Statisztikai Osztályának Közleményei [Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress and American JDC, Statistical Department, Bulletin] 8-9 (1948), p. 16. The Jewish school of Újpest is listed among the schools in Budapest.



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Two of the exceptions are the towns of Miskolc and Nyíregyháza, where the school populations were made up of the handful of survivors of the once-large Jewish communities – those hidden outside the ghettos or in Budapest.

In the summer of 1946, in Miskolc, they showed me the children at school. Before the war, there were 17,000 Jews living in Miskolc; the Jewish school used to be attended by 1,500 children. Then, in 1946, they could gather only 22 children in the schoolyard: some of them had survived in Budapest, others had been hidden by Christians in various bunkers.<sup>8</sup>

Two further exceptions are two reopened schools in the Western part of the country (Transdanubia), where all the communities were deported to Auschwitz. In Pécs and Csorna, the majority of the student population was made up by those temporarily placed in children's homes in the country.<sup>9</sup> Apart from these, even the once-numerous communities in Western Hungary, such as Győr, Nagykanizsa or Kaposvár were forced to give up their teachers' posts.

Only a part of the survivors lived in towns where the Jewish school was reopened or belonged to cohorts teachable in elementary schools. Thus many of the children brought up in this period recall experiences gained – after deportation or hiding – in non-Jewish schools, where their fellow students were not openly hostile but kept their distance and couldn't understand their over-age and “overly experienced” schoolmates, while these children themselves were enveloped in utter silence.<sup>10</sup> There are some examples of students

8 Recollections of Ervin / Shlomo Groszberg in Sándor Bacskai (ed.), *Egy lépés Jeruzsálem felé*, Budapest 1997, p. 38; English edition: *One Step Toward Jerusalem Oral Histories of Orthodox Jews in Stalinist Hungary* (2017). The 1500 children mentioned in the quotation were the number of all Jewish children in Miskolc in 1944 (1488), but not all of them attended the Jewish school. Cf. Tünde Judit Szabó, *A miskolci zsidóság története és demográfiája: a kezdetektől a vészorszakig*. [The History and Demographics of Jews in Miskolc: from the Beginning to the Holocaust], Miskolc 2011, p. 70.

9 There were no children left in the Jewish community of Pécs, apart from a set of under-fourteen twin survivors. The Jewish elementary school could open in January 1946 with 30 pupils, among them only one native of the town. Cf. Sándor Krassó, *Kötéltánc*, Pécs 2011, p. 79.

10 See for example Ágnes Gergely, *Két szimpla a kedvesben Memoár* [Memoir], Budapest 2014, p. 50; Pál Bárdos, *A második évtized* [The Second Decade], Budapest 1981, pp. 71-76.

switching to private tutoring, in the case of families who had no Jewish school in the vicinity but wanted – and could afford – a Jewish education for their children even at this price.<sup>11</sup> Also, some of the children – especially those left without parents – did not take up education before their Aliyah at all, saying “life was their school”.<sup>12</sup>

According to statistics published by the World Jewish Congress, the total student population of Jewish schools outside Budapest in Hungary in the 1946/47 academic year ran to 1,308 students.<sup>13</sup> However, we need to re-emphasize that this number includes those children from Budapest and other locations who were taken into children’s homes, which had a significant impact on student numbers not only in Transdanubia but also in the eastern towns of Békéscsaba, Szeged and Debrecen. The Jewish school in Deszk, for example, only taught children from the local orphanage at the time.<sup>14</sup>

### Children’s Homes in the Countryside

The placement of orphaned children from Budapest in homes in the country was partly the result of the serious food shortage experienced by the capital and the lack of suitable buildings. Apart from practical considerations, however, the Jewish communities in the country showed great willingness to receive children in their midst – the wish of communities bereft of their own children to look after and teach at least the children of others, and the wish to process their own losses and grief through the act of taking care of the needy. Communities like this, which set up children’s homes and supported them

11 For example, a Jewish girl in Kaba (32 kilometres from Debrecen) took her exams as a private student in the Jewish school of Debrecen Status Quo Community. She was prepared for the exams by a local teacher in Kaba. Cf. National Archives of Hungary Hajdú-Bihar County Archives VIII. 184. a. 1.

12 “Interview with Ester Schindler (née. Irén Szegfű, born in 1938, Hajdúnánás)”, in *Yad Vashem Archives* O3 13018, p. 16.

13 Zsidó Világkongresszus Magyarországi képviselője és az Amerikai Joint Distribution Committee Statisztikai Osztályának Közleményei [Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress and American JDC, Statistical Department, Bulletin] 8-9, 1948, p. 16.

14 A list of the children’s homes in the countryside from May of 1947, see Attila Novák, *Átmenetben. A cionista mozgalom négy éve Magyarországon* [In Transition. Four Years of the Zionist Movement in Hungary], Budapest 2000, p. 268.

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even above their own means, were to be found in places that did not reopen their own community schools, like Győr and Mezőkovácsháza.

In the fall of 1945, a proposal was received from Mezőkovácsháza: a few labor servicemen who came back and their children had been murdered, were missing the voices of children. Since there were unused premises, they requested the establishment of a children's home there for orphans from Hajdúság and Budapest.<sup>15</sup>

The Győr Jewish community also received children from Budapest. The home was in a three-room apartment in SzentImrehercegRoad. According to the protocols, from November 1947, the Győr community was campaigning for the children and the home to remain in the town.

Due to the unfortunate fact that the children of Győr had been destroyed by the Fascists, the Jewish community devoted its efforts to convince the Joint's highest leadership about the need to leave the children's home in Győr.<sup>16</sup>

Zionist organizations started to set up children's and young people's homes in early 1945, with *Hashomer Hatzair* in Békéscsaba, *Hanoar Hazioni* in Debrecen, and *Dror Habonim* and *Maccabi Hatzair* in Szeged.<sup>17</sup> Apart from these, two religious, Orthodox ones, *Mizrahi (Bnei Akiba)* and *Agudat Jisrael* were the most important ones running such homes. Their networks, which included day-care centres and agricultural and industrial *hakhsharas* (training centers preparing for Aliyah) and *moshavahs* (training camps for farming), were constantly extended and transformed throughout 1945 and 1946. The

15 Recollections of Ervin / Shlomo Groszberg in Sándor Bacskai, *Egy lépés Jeruzsálem felé*, Budapest 1997, p. 39. English edition: *One Step Toward Jerusalem Oral Histories of Orthodox Jews in Stalinist Hungary*, Syracuse, NY 2017.

16 Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for Jewish Children's Home in Győr, 4 April 1948. Archives of Győr Jewish Community.

17 See details in Attila Novák, *Átmenetben. A cionista mozgalom négy éve Magyarországon* [In Transition: Four Years of the Zionist Movement in Hungary], Budapest 2000, p. 26. On the children's home in Debrecen, see Arieh Lewy, "The Abba Berdichev Children's Home in Debrecen – Hungary". In *Monument to the members of Zionist Youth Movement in the Holocaust and the Uprising*, vol. 3, Tel Yitzhak 1975, pp. 73-98 (Hebrew).

largest number of those living in children's homes comes from May 1946, namely 3,734 children.<sup>18</sup>

Zionist homes were often accused of admitting teenagers without the knowledge and approval of the parents or a referral from the Children's Department; however, the teenagers felt they were choosing a certain form of community life, leaving – or not re-adapting to – the environment that could not protect them from persecution, that could involuntarily abandon them in situations when even the adults had to face unbearably difficult decisions. Community life, shared experiences, and working for the other proved therapeutic, family relations were replaced by attachments found in the community, and the option of a totally different life in Eretz Israel provided a goal.<sup>19</sup>

From late 1947 on, the network of children's homes was governed by a rational strategy, which included the closing down of homes and the setting up of larger umbrella institutions. The gradual expansion and then the gradual shrinking and constant reorganising of the network and the organizing of individuals' emigration to Israel meant that children were always on the move between schools, from year to year and even within the same academic year – the same child could be the student of up to seven schools and children's homes within a few years.<sup>20</sup> When the children involved grew up, they tended to recall these years fondly, focusing on the intensity of community experience and hardly mentioning the problems arising from poor infrastructure and chaotic organizing. Still, that the state educational administration was aiming for more stability for the individual child is entirely reasonable.

The state administration was also intensively interested in students whose documents had been lost or destroyed so their identity could only be ascertained relying on their own statement. In April 1946, in the town of Pécs,

18 Hungarian Jewish Archives XXXIII. 4. a. 5. p. 30.

19 On group cohesion, educational and social activities in children's homes, see, eg. Yitzhak Kashti & Margrethe Levin, "Transition and Change: Biographies of Immigrant-Youth to Israel, 1945-1950", in Yitzhak Kashti et al. (eds.), *A Quest for Identity. Postwar Jewish Biographies*, Tel Aviv 1996, pp. 131-155.

20 The interview with Péter Kertész (b. 1937, Karcag) collected by Centropa offers a characteristic example of those turbulent school years: <http://www.centropa.org/hu/biography/kertesz-peter> (last accessed 4 May 2015).

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there were 12 students like this, out of 25.<sup>21</sup> The educational administration asked for a statement from the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, which ruled, in a somewhat ambiguous manner, that “in cases when the loss of documents can be acceptably proven, a person’s statement should be sufficient proof of their identity”. Some children have no other data entered in the school register apart from their names, which presumably means that they had no other knowledge about their past and their families. This is further corroborated by the fact that the majority of these children are girls aged 6 or 7 – that is, children who may have been hidden by Christian communities during the war with false documents and thus, with time, lost their memories of their original background.

The case of the brothers Grosz, Tibor and Gábor, presented another sort of situation, albeit one that arose infrequently, that called for administrative decision-making. They returned to the town of Debrecen from Germany in 1946, presumably in search of their father, because news had reached them that their father was also among the survivors. After their deportation, the two boys had spent one academic year in a Hungarian DP (Displaced Persons) camp in Esens, Germany, and upon their return they presented a Hungarian school report certified by the local military authority and asked for their finished academic year to be considered part of their studies.<sup>22</sup> Due to a regulation issued by the Ministry, however, they could not be granted this but were required to take an exam comprising the material of their “western” schoolyear, with special regard to “who had taken on the teaching of these students there” and “what kind of influence they might have got under”.<sup>23</sup>

## **Jewish Schools in Budapest**

As for Budapest, the number of students going to Jewish schools was almost identical with that in 1939/40. This shows, on the one hand, that regardless of the destruction of property and loss of life, and at the cost of needing to take recourse in makeshift solutions (using schools in shifts or using places built for other purposes as schools), the Jewish communities were able to rebuild their

21 National Archives of Hungary Baranya County Archives VIII. 263, 43/1946.

22 National Archives of Hungary Hajdú-Bihar County Archives VIII. 184. a. 1, 257/1946.

23 National Archives of Hungary Baranya County Archives VIII. 263, 63/1946.

## Jewish Children and Jewish Schools in Hungary after the Holocaust, 1945-48

pre-war teaching capacities relatively quickly. On the other hand, since the population of the given cohort had dropped by 50-60%, the same number of students meant an all-time high in terms of their percentage (52.6%) within the given cohort.

The Statistical Department of the Hungarian Branch of the World Jewish Congress documented that in 1946/47 there were 18 Jewish primary schools in Budapest (including the then administratively separate Újpest district), with 2184 students and 118 teachers.<sup>24</sup> Seven of these were run by the (Neolog) Pest Jewish Community, two by the Buda Jewish Community, six by the Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Community of Budapest, and one jointly by the Orthodox and Neolog community of Újpest, while two were run by the Hungarian Zionist Alliance – Tarbut Cultural Association.

**Table 2: Jewish primary schools in Budapest, 1946/47**

	<b>Name / Address of the schools</b>	<b>Number of children<sup>25</sup></b>
Buda Jewish Community (2 schools)	49. Zsigmond Str.	18
	Baracs Károly School (6. Váli Str.)	16
Pest Jewish Community (7 schools)	44. Wesselényi Str.	490
	21/b. Hollán Ernő Str.	156
	31. Eötvös Str.	74
	School in Boys' Orphanage	No data
	School of the Teachers' Training College	(1948/49) 100
	Boys' and girls' Elementary Schools Szt. Domonkos – Abonyi Str.	436

24 Zsidó Világkongresszus Magyarországi képviselete és az Amerikai Joint Distribution Committee Statisztikai Osztályának Közleményei [Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress and American JDC, Statistical Department, Bulletin] 8-9, 1948, p. 16.

25 Budapest City Archives VIII. nos. 254, 265, 313, 1911, 1912, 1922, 1931, 1947, 1948 and 2050.

## Viktória Bányai

	Name / Address of the schools	Number of children <sup>25</sup>
Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Community (schools 6)	35. Dob Str. – Boys' and girls' middle school; boys' and girls' elementary school	414
	Bikkur Cholim Girls' Orphanage (Rákosszentmihály)	33
	Orphanage on Szt. Domonkos Str.	43
Hungarian Zionist Alliance -Tarbut Cultural Association (schools 2)	.26 Rökk Szilárd Str.	(1947/48) 167
	149. Hungária Blvd. Children's Home in Mátyásföld +	(1945/46) 124
		(1945/46) 34
Újpest Jewish Community, from 1946	Venetianer Lajos School (2. Venetianer Str.)	37
Óbuda Jewish Community, from 1947	9. Zichy Str.	No data

The Hebrew bilingual Tarbut schools run by the Hungarian Zionist Alliance – Tarbut Cultural Association were frequently mentioned institutions, earlier unknown in Hungary.<sup>26</sup> In spirit as well as in staff make-up, these were the continuation of the Hebrew bilingual school movement of the interwar years, more specifically the Hebrew schools of the Transcarpathia region.<sup>27</sup> In the 1945/46 academic year, two elementary and lower secondary school courses were opened with the permission of the Ministry – one in the children's home in Deszk and another one in Budapest. The details can be found in the yearbook of the Association.<sup>28</sup> The yearbook also mentions plans concerning

26 Cf. Miriam Riesel, *Ha-hinnukh ha-yehudi be-Hungaria ba-shanim 1945-49. Tekufat ha-shilton ha-demokrati be-Hungaria*, MA thesis, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, 1976.

27 A network of Tarbut ("culture in Hebrew") schools, i.e. secular Hebrew-language schools was operating during the interwar periode in Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states. On the Hebrew bilingual schools in Transcarpathia of the interwar years and on the question of the the continuity, see for example: Arieh Sole, *Orot be-harim: Ha-hinnukh ha-ivri ha-zioni be-Karpatorus ba-shanim 1920-1944*, Tel Aviv 1986, pp. 225-235.

28 Aladár Spiegel (ed.), *A Tarbut Héber Kultúregyesület iskoláinak Évkönyve az 1945-46-os tanévről*, Budapest 1946.

the opening of new schools in the next schoolyear, but not all of these plans were realized. In the 1946/47 academic year, a primary and secondary school was opened in the building of the Rabbinical Seminary (26 Röck Szilárd Street), in the children's home on Hungária Boulevard there were elementary school classes, and the children's home in the Mátyásföld district also hosted several classes. According to the matricula of the primary school, many of the children were orphans or semi-orphans living in children's homes. The Zionist organizations running children's homes would probably have gladly chosen this type of school for their students.<sup>29</sup> Hebrew as the language of instruction, however, could only be introduced gradually, not only because the children did not know the basics of the language, but due to the lack of Hebrew speaking teachers and teaching materials in Hebrew as well. Endre Gellért, the school inspector of the Pest Jewish community, asked for assistance in these matters at the conference held in Jerusalem in the summer of 1947 on Hebrew education in the Diaspora.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from the shortage of children, the shortage of teaching staff was also an obstacle to the reorganising of schools. Many teachers had perished during the war in forced labour or extermination camps, and many of those who survived could not return to the country as POWs or had such poor health that they had to abandon teaching. This shortage was a problem every school had to face. An especially striking example of this kind of stock-taking is the poem written by Mrs Miksa Almási, a teacher of the Orthodox elementary school of Debrecen, called "The Higher Grade"- commemorating the 200 missing children and 3 teachers. The poem was recited at the closing ceremony of the six-week substitute course meant to make up for the lost schoolyear in the summer of 1945.<sup>31</sup>

The setting up of the new teaching staff required substantial organising effort both in terms of finding appropriate teachers and the administrative

29 Budapest City Archives VIII. 2050: Register of Tarbut Hebrew Elementary School from the school year 1947-48.

30 Endre Gellért, "Ha-hinnukh ha-ivri be-Hungaria" in *Ha-hinnukh ha-ivri be-tefutzot ha-gola*, Jerusalem 1948, pp. 141-143.

31 Hungarian Jewish Archives XIX (Almási Family). In print: László Feuermann & György Weisz (eds.), *A debreceni holokauszt ötvenedik évfordulójára, 1944-1994*, Debrecen, 1994.



aspects of transferring and employing them. The inspectorate of the Pest Jewish Community appealed to potential teachers (even those of retirement age) in the weekly paper, *Új Élet*.<sup>32</sup> Dezső Gábor, headmaster of the Status Quo community of Debrecen, wrote urgent petitions to the inspectorate and the ministry as late as September 1945, days after the new schoolyear had been officially opened, asking for an improvement in the situation of staff members. Five of the nine elementary teachers who had worked in the school before the war were dead and three were on sick leave. He was asking for the transfer of Ms Szeréna Berkovics from nearby Püspökladány, since only three children of school-age had returned there after the war, and thus the local school could not be reopened.<sup>33</sup> Ms Berkovics had been teaching in Püspökladány from 1922, but in the summer of 1945 she was registered as a teacher at the joint summer course of the two communities. In a strong sign of the grave shortage of teaching staff, at the beginning of the schoolyear the two communities, the Status Quo and the Orthodox one got into a dispute over which should hire Ms Berkovics. The argument was finally settled by the inspectorate, which transferred two teachers to the Orthodox school from nearby Hajdúböszörmény, where they also could not reopen the local Orthodox school.<sup>34</sup>

### **Circumstances and specificities of Jewish schools**

The school buildings themselves were damaged during the war to varying degrees, but their equipment – including desks, libraries, and demonstration materials – was generally lost.<sup>35</sup> They could hardly be replaced until all schools were taken over by the state. To quote from statistical reports and the replies to inspectorate queries: “Our 100-volume library got completely destroyed, without exception”. (Eötvös Street, Budapest) “The damage (in terms of furniture, blackboards and demonstration materials) ran to 80-100%”. (Girls’

32 *Új Élet*, 7 February 1946, p. 7.

33 National Archives of Hungary Hajdú-Bihar County Archives VIII. 184. a. 1, 14/1945-1946.

34 National Archives of Hungary Hajdú-Bihar County Archives VIII. 186. a. 1, 220/1946.

35 Building and equipment damage, of course, hit other schools as well. Unfortunately, data on damages has been published in summary form, without denominational specification. Cf. József Balogh, *A fővárosi iskolák állapota 1946-ban*, Budapest 1947.

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School, Wesselényi Street, Budapest) “The gym is entirely devoid of sports equipment”. (Baracs Károly School, Budapest) “The headmaster is glad to see that the teachers have developed methods that are efficient without using maps or any other demonstrational materials”. (Bethlen Square, Budapest) When the school district inspectorate called upon all the schools to hand in fascist and irredentist books and materials, all the Jewish schools replied that they had not possessed any of these in the first place but all their equipment had been lost anyway, so there was nowhere to look. Some schools called upon parents to help them get some much-needed equipment – the inspectorate of the Pest Jewish Community went as far as publishing a newspaper advertisement in the autumn of 1945 asking for Hebrew Bibles.<sup>36</sup> In Szeged, the Jewish school was lent 100 chairs from the town’s supply of the Open-air Festival in late 1946.<sup>37</sup>

For some children, settling back into school life took longer than for others. Many Jewish children from Budapest spent the spring and summer of 1945 in the countryside, taking part in recreational activities provided by various organizations. Later, they were required to take exams comprising the material of the skipped schoolyear. Then, in the winter of 1945/46, the serious food and fuel shortage in Budapest caused many children to be sent to the countryside yet again; accordingly, they missed further classes and had to take exams in large numbers, as reflected in the documentation of the Jewish schools in Budapest in late 1946. We even find documents revealing that some children could only resume their studies as late as the 1946/47 or even the next schoolyear, for example, because of prolonged medical treatment. Some of them were older than their classmates by two or three years, so several schools provided them opportunities to cover the material of two years in just one year to catch up with their own cohort.

The work week of Jewish schools was different from that of non-Jewish ones, since they observed the Sabbath. There was no teaching on Saturday, and children had to attend services at the synagogue. Some of them had five-day work weeks (Monday-Friday), while others had six-day ones (Sunday-Friday). Extra holidays and shortened schooldays had to be introduced in the winter of

36 *Új Élet*, 13 November 1945, p.8.

37 Archives of Szeged Jewish Community 274/1946.

1946/47 due to a fuel shortage, but this happened in Jewish and non-Jewish schools alike.

In some of the schools we looked at, the teaching of Hebrew underwent significant changes after the war. In the pre-war period, Hebrew would be taught as part of religious education, as the language of the Bible – focusing on Biblical Hebrew in terms of both grammar and vocabulary and using Biblical texts as teaching material. After the war, however, the methods of teaching Hebrew as a living foreign language were also acknowledged and used, at least in the schools where the community and the parents expressed such a wish and the teachers were prepared to fulfil it. Hebrew played the greatest role in the above-mentioned Tarbut schools, where it became the language of instruction. But, for example, the Status Quo School in Debrecen also got permission from the local inspectorate to teach living Hebrew in the autumn of 1945.<sup>38</sup> Mór Isbéthi (Mannheim) (1898-?) and László Lőwy (Arieh Lewy, 1923-2006) were two famous Hebrew teachers in that school. In the Jewish school of Pécs, a new curriculum was introduced for the 1947/48 schoolyear, which included four Hebrew classes a week, taught by the then-young Rabbi József Schweitzer (1922-2015).<sup>39</sup> This curriculum also emphasized the separation of language teaching and religious education, and many children could later make use of their command of spoken Hebrew gained in these years in Israel.

Religious education (RE) raised some difficult questions during these years. We encountered the same RE questions articulated in many different forums and forms: after the deportation, after the ghetto, after the concentration camps, what was there to teach about God, about humanity, about belief?

We work with a different youth than the teachers of religious studies in the past. The young children of yesterday now go to upper primary and have the horrendous experience of the war behind them. They have learnt that lying is a virtue, lawlessness is smart, and denial is courage. A world order and world view based on morality, a supernatural God, and

38 National Archives of Hungary Hajdú-Bihar County Archives VIII. 184. a. 1, 138/1947.

39 National Archives of Hungary Baranya County Archives VIII. 263. Time-table of the school, December 1947.

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motherly caring are all not just unknown but negated, or even trampled in the mud”.<sup>40</sup>

The uselessness of the old content and methods was recognized not just by the teachers of religious studies but also by the educational administration of the Jewish community. Many emphasized the importance of the authenticity of the teachers, with the unsaid but suggested assumption that the Holocaust meant an immense trial of faith and morality even for adults, let alone children. There was a great need for teachers who not merely taught religion but were themselves religious and gave children an opportunity for commitment.<sup>41</sup>

As for the methods to be used, they stress the importance of experience, special services for youth, and singing Hebrew songs. Rabbi Adolf Fisch, the chief inspector in charge of RE within the Jewish community went much further in a letter addressed to the RE instructors of the Pest Jewish Community in May 1945, denying the earlier principles of neology. He called “*Jewish-Hungarianness*”, that is, a faith in the feasibility of being Jewish by faith and Hungarian by ethnicity a historic impossibility, “*negative acrobatics*” – and having got rid of this faith it was now possible to openly talk and teach about “*Jewish Jews*”, “*the Jewish people*”, a national language and the return to the “*ancient-new land*”.<sup>42</sup> The new RE curriculum compiled by Endre Gellért in mid-1945 was written in a similar vein, focusing on the separateness of the Jewish people, the national language, and the importance of the knowledge of Eretz Israel.<sup>43</sup>

The work of RE instructors was also undermined by the tension between different educational standards: the contrast between RE education at school and the pupils’ homes, or between the school and the views of the Zionist children’s home. Pupils were learning about the Jewish holidays and traditions, but the family did not observe the Sabbath, Passover, etc., and in some children’s homes, the education was expressly anti-religious.<sup>44</sup>

40 Miklós Klein, “Korszerű hitoktatás”, *Az Országos Rabbiegyesület Értesítője*, 2 June 1947, p. 17.

41 Miklós Bernáth, “Korszerű hitoktatás”, *Az Országos Rabbiegyesület Értesítője*, 2 June 1947, p.20.

42 Hungarian Orthodox Jewish Archives and Library, 93/1945.

43 Hungarian Orthodox Jewish Archives and Library, 149/1945.

44 See the article by Endre Gellért in *Szabad Újpesti Zsidó Élet*, April 1947, pp. 9-11.

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In parallel with the school system, but usually not in the same buildings, a network of daycare centers was set up. Here, needy children were given free lunch in a warm and friendly space and could do their homework under the supervision of qualified teachers. These institutions were financed by the Joint and the National Jewish Relief Committee, while the centers were actually run by Zionist youth organizations and Jewish communities. In Budapest, there were daycare centers in areas where community schools had not reopened: among others, at 31 Magdolna Street, 9 Román Street (Kőbánya), and 9 Zichy Street (Óbuda). It should be pointed out that even after nationalization of denominational schools, some of the daycare centers run by the communities continued to operate. According to National Jewish Relief Committee data, in the 1949/50 school year, more than 700 children were provided for.<sup>45</sup>

The daycare centers were forums of community life as well – one of the spaces where the children, made precocious, disillusioned and wild by the losses they had suffered, had the opportunity to re-learn how to play and take part in age-appropriate activities.<sup>46</sup> Various art forms – choir singing, poetry recital and acting – were found in the children's homes and daycare centers in the given period. This was another part of the (mostly instinctive) toolkit of the adults who tried to help the surviving children deal with their losses and traumas. For other children, belonging to the Jewish scouting movement was an important experience.<sup>47</sup> These groups, which resumed their activity right after the war, helped the recovery of the children by providing community values and a sense of belonging. We have data confirming the functioning of five such troops in Budapest and two in the countryside from the given period.<sup>48</sup>

45 Hungarian Jewish Archives XXXIII. 7. b. 1.

46 In his memoirs Pál Bárdos describes in detail the ferocity of their activities, threatening bodily harm and causing damage. See Pál Bárdos, *A második évtized* [The Second Decade], Budapest 1981, pp. 67-70; Cf. Memoirs of Gábor Sztehlo: *Sztehlo Gábor gépelt emlékirata*, Lutheran Archives Hungary, Records of Gábor Sztehlo, pp. 134-135, 157.

47 A rich source for the history of the Scouting Movement in Hungary is the Scout Library and Archives, housed in the Town Library of Gödöllő.

48 The five troops in Budapest were: no. 252. József Kiss (Pest Jewish Community Boys' Higher Elementary School), no. 297. József Eötvös (Pest Jewish Community Boys' High School), no. 310. Mór Jókai (MIKÉFE /Hungarian Jewish Craft And Agricultural

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The period of postwar recovery, when survivors attempted to reconstruct pre-Holocaust community life as much as possible, also in the areas related to children proved more or less successful. The few years of intensive work carried out by Zionist organizations created new actors, organizations, and educational concepts. Within the semi-democratic system of the 1945-48 period, religious schools in Hungary, including the Jewish ones, enjoyed relatively wide autonomy in terms of shaping their own educational program, setting up their organizational framework and deciding on the content of their educational work. Schools, day-care centres, Zionist organizations and scouts' troops all had an important role to play in the emotional recovery of the surviving orphaned children.

The state takeover – the nationalization of public education, the liquidation of Zionist organizations and scouting, and the abolishment of compulsory religious education – stopped this process as well. The institutional network, organizational frameworks, and activities were either stopped or drastically reduced in number, parallel to the repression of denominational and independent civil life by the political regime, and this generated yet another emigration wave.

Union), no. 311. Mihály Vörösmarty (Buda Jewish Community), no. 446. Salamon (Pest Jewish Community Boys' Orphanage). The 2 in the countryside were: no. 598. Miklós Jósika (Szeged Jewish Community) and no. 615. Ámosz (Jewish Elementary School of Pécs). In addition to these troops, three more troops received financial support from the Joint after 1945: Miklós Toldi, Endre Ady & George Washington. Hungarian Jewish Archives XXXIII. 4. a. 1.