



THE

Hungarian Historical Review

NEW SERIES OF ACTA HISTORICA
ACADEMIÆ SCIENTIARUM HUNGARICÆ

The Holocaust in Hungary in Contexts

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 3
2015

Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities,
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

The Hungarian Historical Review

New Series of Acta Historica
Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae

Volume 4 No. 3 2015

The Holocaust in Hungary in Contexts. New Perspectives and Research Results

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Special Editor of the Thematic Issue

Contents

Introduction by the Special Editor 539

Articles

ANDRÁS SZÉCSÉNYI Development and Bifurcation of an Institution.
The Voluntary Labor Service and the Compulsory
National Defense Labor Service of the Horthy Era 542

GÁBOR SZEGEDI Stand by Your Man. Honor and Race Defilement
in Hungary, 1941–44 577

REGINA FRITZ Inside the Ghetto: Everyday Life
in Hungarian Ghettos 606

ATTILA GIDÓ The Hungarian Bureaucracy and the Administrative
Costs of the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania 641

ANDERS E. B. BLOMQUIST Local Motives for Deporting Jews. Economic
Nationalizing in Szatmárnémeti in 1944 673

KINGA FROJIMOVICS
AND ÉVA KOVÁCS Jews in a 'Judenrein' City: Hungarian Jewish Slave
Laborers in Vienna (1944–1945) 705

KATA BOHUS Not a Jewish Question? The Holocaust in Hungary
in the Press and Propaganda of the Kádár Regime
during the Trial of Adolf Eichmann 737

Book Reviews

- Jewish Histories of the Holocaust: New Transnational Approaches.
Edited by Norman J. W. Goda. Reviewed by Ilse Josepha Lazaroms 773
- A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide.
By Alon Confino. Reviewed by Benedetta Carnaghi 778
- Perben és haragban világháborús önmagunkkal. Tanulmányok. [In Trial and in Anger with Our Roles in World War II: A Collection of Essays].
By Judit Pihurik. Reviewed by Enikő A. Sajti 783
- Political Justice in Budapest after World War II.
By Ildikó Barna and Andrea Pető. Reviewed by Istvan Pal Adam 790
- Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung.
Edited by Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw. Reviewed by Ferenc Laczó 796
- Notes on Contributors 803



Kinga Frojimovics and Éva Kovács

Jews in a ‘Judenrein’ City: Hungarian Jewish Slave Laborers in Vienna (1944–1945)¹

In the early summer and autumn of 1944, more than 55,000 Hungarian Jews had been deported to Austria as forced laborers. 17,500 of them arrived in Strasshof from various Hungarian ghettos in the summer of 1944. There, a real “slave market” was opened to meet the demands of Austrian entrepreneurs who urgently needed manpower in their factories and farms. The deported families—mainly mothers, children and grandparents—had to work in Vienna and in Lower Austria on farms, in trade, and in particular in the “war industry” (for example, in construction companies, bread factories, or oil refineries) as forced laborers. The working and living conditions of the forced laborers varied widely depending on the camp in which they were housed, the branch of industry in which they had to work, and the conduct of the local military administration in the camps and the various workplaces. In this essay, we highlight two fundamental aspects of the topic which are connected to two different methodological approaches to socio-historical understanding. On the one hand, we re-localize the history of Hungarian Jewish slave labor in Vienna on the basis of historical sources, documents and testimonies. On the other, using the same testimonies and archival materials, we portray the everyday lives and typical survival strategies of slave laborers.

Keywords: Holocaust, Nazi persecution, Hungarian Jews, Austria, forced labor, oral history, urban spaces, World War II

Introduction

On June 14, 1944, Adolf Eichmann, who was then in Hungary directing the deportation of the Jews of Hungary to Auschwitz, unexpectedly offered Rezső Kasztner the following deal: in exchange for 5 million Swiss francs, he would be willing to ship 30,000 Jews to Austria for forced labor.² By then, Kasztner—the vice president of the Budapest Jewish Rescue Committee (*Budapesti Segélyező és Mentőbizottság*, in Hebrew *Vaadat ha'Ezra ve'ha'Hatzalah*), an organization

1 This study is an extended version of the joint paper we presented at the fifth international multidisciplinary conference “Beyond Camps and Forced Labour: Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution.” (Imperial War Museum London, January 7–9, 2015).

2 On the negotiation between Eichmann and Kasztner, see Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996).

of Jewish self-rescue—had been engaged in negotiations with Eichmann for months. While in the background of this unexpected offer was the fact that SS-Brigadeführer Hanns Blaschke, the Nazi mayor of Vienna, had demanded workers and the decision to send Hungarian Jews to Austria to meet his request had already been made, Eichmann presented the offer to Kasztner as a special favor.³

As the Jews from the first, second and third zones had already been deported to Auschwitz, members of the *Budapest Jewish Rescue Committee* and the local Jewish leaders started to select the people to be sent to Vienna and its vicinity from the fourth deportation zone located in southern Hungary.⁴ (The last trains from the third deportation zone left for Auschwitz on June 16.) Therefore, people from among the Jewish population of the next zone were selected for deportation to Strasshof, a camp near Vienna. While the deportation of the Jews from this zone took place between June 25 and 28 (in total, 40,505 Jews were taken to Auschwitz from four ghettos), five trainloads of Jews, altogether 15,011 people, were taken to Strasshof between June 27 and 30. 564 deportees arrived in Strasshof from Baja, 6,641 from Debrecen, 5,239 from Szeged, and 2,567 from Szolnok.⁵

The report of the lager physician of Strasshof, which registered the deaths of Jews deported to the camp from Hungary (the first entry is dated July 1, 1944), says a great deal about the circumstances of the Strasshof deportations. In total,

3 Concerning the background of the Strasshof deportation, see Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, *Ungarisch-Jüdische Zwangsarbeiter und Zwangsarbeiterinnen in Österreich 1944/45: Arbeitseinsatz – Todesmärsche – Folgen* (Vienna: Lit, 2010), 45–49; and Irene Suchy, *Strasshof an der Nordbahn: Die NS-Geschichte eines Ortes und ihre Aufarbeitung* (Vienna: Metroverlag, 2011).

4 In April 1944, the Hungarian authorities, together with the members of the Sonderkommando Eichmann, divided Hungary into six deportation zones: I. Karpatoruthenia and Northeastern Hungary, II. Northern Transylvania, III. Northern Hungary, IV. Southeastern Hungary, V. Western Hungary and VI. Budapest and its vicinity. The deportation followed this geographical order. See Randolph R. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

5 The data concerning the number of the deportees are provided by Edith Csillag, who was a deportee herself. She was deported from Mezőtúr to the Szolnok ghetto and, from there, to Strasshof. Thanks to her knowledge of German, she was assigned to office work in the camp. See her testimony in the Hungarian Jewish Archives (Budapest), DEGOB protocols, No. 3628. On Szeged and the Strasshof deportation, see Judit Molnár, “Embermentés vagy árulás? A Kasztner-akció szegedi vonatkozásai,” in idem, *Csendőrok, hivatalnokok, zsidók: Válogatott tanulmányok a magyar holokauszt történetéből* (Szeged: Szegedi Zsidó Hitközség, 2000), 191–97. Concerning the process and the stages of the Strasshof deportation, see Szabolcs Szita, *Utak a pokolból: Magyar deportáltak az anektált Ausztriában 1944–1945* (Budapest: Metalon, 1991), 41–45, and Szabolcs Szita, *Verschleppt, Verhungert, Vernichtet: Die Deportation von ungarischen Juden auf das Gebiet des annektierten Österreich 1944–1945* (Vienna: Eichbauer Verlag, 1999).

six mainly elderly people died on July 1, five of them because of heatstroke (*Hitzschlag*), according to the physician's notes.⁶

In Strasshof a veritable “slave market” was opened to satisfy the demands of Austrian entrepreneurs who urgently needed manpower in their factories and on their estates and farms. The deported families, consisting primarily of mothers, children, and grandparents, had to work in Vienna and in Lower Austria as slave laborers in agriculture, trade, and in particular in the war industry, for example, in construction companies, bread factories, oil refineries, etc. Both the official sources and the testimonies indicate that the working and living conditions of slave laborers varied widely depending on the camp in which they were detained, the branch of industry in which they were compelled to work, and the behavior of local organs of the military administration.

In 2014, the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute initiated a remembrance tour concerning this short period in the history of the Holocaust in Hungary.⁷ We, the authors of this article, participated in the pilot project of the tour. During the research phase, we collected hundreds of testimonies, original documents, photos, and protocols of the People's Court, etc., in order to construct and contextualize the history of Hungarian Jewish slave labor in Vienna on the micro-historical level. As a result of this research project, we identified more than 100 entrepreneurs and firms (e.g. *Ankerbrotfabrik*, *Shell Oil Company*, *Siemens-Werke*, *Waagner-Biro AG*, *Städtisches Elektrizitäts- und Gaswerk*, *Papierfabrik ROJA*, etc.) which had exploited Hungarian Jewish slave labor.⁸ In the summer of 2014, an interactive website was developed displaying the sixty most important places in Vienna. It shows the topography of suffering of the Hungarian Jews in Vienna in the last year of World War II.

In this article, we highlight two fundamental aspects of the topic which are connected to two different methodological approaches to socio-historical understanding. On the one hand, in part two, we re-localize the history of Hungarian Jewish slave labor in Vienna on the basis of historical sources, documents and testimonies. Our analysis moves as close as possible to the specific sites of Hungarian slave labor and attempts to ‘rewrite’ the urban landscape of

6 Tötenbeschau Befunden vom Durchgangslager Strasshof (Archiv IKG Wien, Bestand Wien, A/VIE/IKG/II–III/FH/1/1, Box No. 1).

7 See: “Ungarische Zwangsarbeit in Wien,” accessed May 6, 2015, <http://ungarische-zwangsarbeit-in-wien.at/>.

8 For the current list of entrepreneurs, see *Betriebe* menu on the website of the project: “Ungarische Zwangsarbeit in Wien,” accessed May 6, 2015, <http://ungarische-zwangsarbeit-in-wien.at/>.

Vienna. In this part we also discuss typical social spaces of slave labor in Vienna. On the other hand, in part three, our socio-historical analysis unfolds in the opposite direction: using the same testimonies and archival materials, we portray the everyday lives and typical survival strategies of slave laborers.

Methodological Remarks

The historiography of this episode of the Hungarian Holocaust has not yet examined specific urban spaces. Although the books by Szabolcs Szita and Eleonore Lappin-Eppel contain fragments on particular events that can be localized, they tell a concise and coherent (hi)story in which spatial, socio-geographical specificities do not play an important role. Tim Cole's place-based research on the social history of ghettoization and the deportation of Hungarian Jews offers more conceptual similarities and can therefore help us arrive at answers to our questions.⁹ As he writes, "my fear was that if I cited these passages within a chapter examining, say, daily life in Hungarian ghettos, I would end up erasing the space-specific uniqueness of this particular trace."¹⁰ In his book, Cole decided to tell 'small stories,' "each of which reflects the possibilities and limitations of a particular material trace of this past."¹¹ In this chapter we show the typical places and scenes of slave labor using, like Cole, 'small stories,' which function like snapshots rather than narratives.

Before presenting such snapshots, we provide clarification concerning the sources and methods on which our research is based. The typical archival sources, on which we drew before expanding the methodological scope of our research would not have permitted us to provide nuanced descriptions of the sites where the slave laborers were compelled to reside and work and the ways, in which these sites were interpreted by the slave laborers themselves. These sources—primarily lists of firms, hospital documentation, death certificates, commands and orders, and the protocols of the People's Court—lack not only the personal views of the slave laborers themselves but also socio-historical

9 Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York–London: Routledge, 2003), and Tim Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust: Journeying in and out of the Ghettos* (London: Continuum, 2011).

10 Ibid., *Traces of the Holocaust*, 13.

11 Ibid., 14.

information regarding the various places. This gap can be filled with personal diaries, testimonies and oral history interviews.¹²

In recent decades, testimonies and oral history interviews have become ‘ordinary’ historical sources in the historiography of the Holocaust. One of the first ambitious and successful experiments was the book by Christopher Browning on the Starachowice camp. Browning managed to construct a history of this camp largely on the basis of testimonies, thus helping to change the status of oral history sources in mainstream history-writing.¹³ Although we share his reservations concerning the authenticity and factual accuracy of testimonies, we do not follow his ‘accumulative’ methodology, which is based on the compilation of an allegedly sufficient critical mass of testimonies that “can be tested against one another.”¹⁴ We also borrow the anthropological method of extended case study, as discussed by Mario Luis Small, the crux of which is that the generalizable features of individual cases provide chances for deduction. In Small’s words, “the approaches call for logical rather than statistical inference, for case- rather than sample-based logic, for saturation rather than representation as the stated aims of research. The approaches produce more logically sensible hypotheses and more transparent types of empirical statements.”¹⁵ Hence,

12 Pál Bárdos, *Az első évtized* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1975); Peter Cukor, *Before the Silver Cord is Snapped: Looking Back on My Journey* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2004); Szilvia Czingel, ed. *Szakácskönyv a túlélésért – Lichtenwörth, 1944–45* (Budapest: Corvina, 2013); Mária Ember, *Hajtűkanyar* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1974); Judit Fenákel, *K-vonal* (Budapest: XXI. Század, 2013); András Fischer, *Und die Hauptsache, wir leben... Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt am Main–Munich–London–Miami–New York: Fouqué Literaturverlag, 2002); István Hargittai, *Our Lives – Encounters of a Scientist* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 2004); Ladislaus Löb and Rezső Kasztner, *The Daring Rescue of Hungarian Jews: A Survivor’s Account* (London: Pimlico, 2009); Zvi Nassi, *Haglijah* (Givat Haviva: Moreshet Archive, 1995); Paul Schonberger and Imre Schonberger, *Fortuna’s Children* (London–Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003); Helena Schvarcz-Horovitz, *Ein Hering für zwei Zigaretten. Erinnerungen einer Holocaust-Überlebenden an die Deportation der ungarischen Juden nach Strasshof, an die Arbeitslager in Wien und die Todesmärsche durch Österreich* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 2006); Szabolcs Szita, ed., *Zwangsarbeit, Todesmärsche, Überleben durch Hilfe: Die österreichische Bevölkerung in der Erinnerung der ungarischen Deportierten und politischen Häftlinge 1944–1945* (Budapest: Velcsöv, 2004); József Bihari, “Als ungarisch-jüdischer Zwangsarbeiter in Wien,” accessed May 6, 2015, <http://www.erinnern.at/bundeslaender/wien/unterrichtsmaterial/arbeitsblaetter-gedaechtnisorte-des-ns-terrors-in-der-israelischen-abteilung-des-wiener-zentralfriedhofs/Arbeitsblatt%20Jozsef%20Bihari.pdf>; Diary of Varga Béla, entitled *Nebéz napok* (Strochlitz Archive, Haifa, Israel).

13 Christopher R. Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), and Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

14 Browning, *Remembering Survival*, 7.

15 Mario Luis Small, “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’ On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research,” *Ethnography* 10, no. 1 (2009): 5–38, 28.

although the following interview excerpts are uniquely complex, the unfolding life strategies can be considered relevant in other cases of Hungarian Jewish slave labor in Vienna.

An additional remark is due, since these interviews were conducted with child survivors. As children, they not only perceived things differently than adults would have, but their everyday activities were also different from those of their parents and grandparents. Although literary historians and psychotherapists have been studying children's experiences and traumas of the Holocaust for a long time, children testimonies, with a few exceptions,¹⁶ have not been made a basic source of socio-historical research yet.

Re-localisation of the History of Slave Labor in Vienna

Deportations to Austria

The Jewish slave laborers who were deported from Hungary were under the command of the Higher Commander of the SS and the Police in Hungary, *Sondereinsatzkommando Aussenkommando Wien* headed by *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Hermann Krumei. Krumei's office was in the building of the former Jewish high school of Vienna at Castellezgasse 35 in the 2nd district of the city.

On January 10, 1945, Kasztner, who was closely observing the fate of the Strasshof group of deportees, met with Krumei in Vienna. In the course of this meeting, Krumei provided the following information concerning the number of deportees: according to his records, 17,500-18,000 Jews had arrived in Vienna and its vicinity from Hungary.¹⁷ By early 1945, about 1,000 of them had died as a consequence of "natural causes or sickness." In addition, 170 Jews were taken to Bergen-Belsen and some to Auschwitz as "punishment," to quote Krumei. From July 1944 until May 1945, many of the slave laborers died as a result of the bad living and working conditions, because of the almost permanent bombardments in Vienna, or during the evacuation of the camps in

16 See e.g. Boaz Cohen and Rita Horváth, "Young Witnesses in the DP camps: Children's Holocaust Testimony in Context," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 11, no. 1 (2012): 103–25; Boaz Cohen, "The Children's Voice: Post-War Collection of Testimonies from Children Survivors of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 1 (2007): 73–95; and Johannes-Dieter Steinert, *Deportation und Zwangsarbeit: Polnische und sowjetische Kinder im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland und im besetzten Osteuropa 1939–1945* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2013).

17 László Karsai and Judit Molnár, eds., *The Kasztner Report: The Report of the Budapest Jewish Rescue Committee, 1942–1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2013), 284.

death marches toward Mauthausen and its satellite camps. During these death marches, many Hungarian Jewish slave laborers were massacred.

Krumey did not inform Kasztner that diabetic deportees, for example, did not receive insulin, since the medicine was only distributed to Wehrmacht soldiers. Diabetic Jews were first taken to the so-called Krankenlager Laxenburg. If they were still alive, they were deported to concentration and extermination camps from there. Air raids also took a heavier toll than was expected, since in numerous camps Jews were forbidden to use the bomb shelters.

According to Krumey's records, the age distribution of the 16,600 Jewish slave laborers who had been deported from Hungary and who found themselves in Vienna and its vicinity in January 1945 was the following:

Age	Male	Female
0–2 years of age	200	250
3–6 years of age	500	500
7–12 years of age	900	900
13–14 years of age	400	350
15–20 years of age	800	1300
above 21 years of age	4500	6000

In January of 1945, then, almost one fourth of the Jewish slave laborers deported from Hungary to Vienna and its vicinity, some 4,000 people, were



Map 1: General Map of Hungarian Jewish Slave Labor in Vienna 1944–45
(© Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies 2014–2015)

children under the age of 14. Unfortunately, we do not know more about Krumey's records, because on April 13, during the siege of Vienna, the documents in Krumey's office on Castellezgasse concerning the Strasshof deportees were destroyed.¹⁸

The Wohnlager

In Vienna, the so-called *Wohnlager* was the most characteristic form of accommodation for the slave laborers. These family camps were set up mainly in school buildings in almost every district of the city.¹⁹ The following five schools housed the largest camps: 283 Jews at Schrankenberggasse 32 in the 10th district, 585 Jews at Bischoffgasse 10 in the 12th district, 450 Jews at Hackengasse 11 in the 15th district, 639 Jews at Mengergasse 33 in the 21st district, and 358 Jews at Konstanziagasse 24 in the 22nd district.²⁰

In some of the schools, instruction was still going on in the early summer of 1944, so Viennese civilians must have been aware of the presence of the deportees. However, the entries that we found in the relevant chronicle of the *Wohnlager*-school on Bischoffgasse make no mention whatsoever of the Jewish slave laborers,²¹ in spite of the fact that at Bischoffgasse 10 there was a large lager under the control of the city of Vienna and the command of a municipal officer, *Lagerführer* Franz Knoll. Nearly 600 Jews who had been deported from Hungary lived in the camp, including 59 children.²² The elderly and the sick were left to perish in Lager 12 (they were taken to the attic of the school where no care was provided for them). Sándor Hargittai, who was eleven years old in 1944 and whose grandmother was among those who perished in the attic, remembered the events as follows: "They left food in front of the entrance of

18 Ibid., 309.

19 See Richtlinien über die Behandlung ungarischer Juden, 9. August 1944 (DÖW – Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, E 21.204.).

20 Lappin-Eppel, *Ungarisch-Jüdische Zwangsarbeiter und Zwangsarbeiterinnen in Österreich*, 92. See also "Liste von Lagern ungarischer Juden im Gau Groß-Wien" (DÖW – Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, E 21.053/2).

21 Schul-Chronik, Allg. Öffentl. Volksschule f. Knaben u. Mädchen, Vienna XII., Bischoffgasse 10.

22 Franz Knoll, born in Vienna in 1892, was put on trial after the war. Even though Lagerführer Knoll was sentenced to 18 months in prison in August 1948, he was in effect freed, because the court deducted his 22 month-long period of detention from his sentence. Concerning Knoll and his trial, see Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, "Strukturen der Verantwortung. Volksgerichtsverfahren wegen Verbrechen gegen ungarische Juden in österreichischen Zwangsarbeitslagern des Sondereinsatzkommandos der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in Ungarn, Außenkommando Wien," *Zeitgeschichte* 6 (2007): 351–71.

the attic. Every morning they reported the dead.”²³ In contrast, the children who were able to work and even pregnant women who were giving birth were taken to hospitals. For example, in August 1944, nine Jewish children housed in the *Wohnlager* in the school were hospitalized with measles. The oldest among them was eight years old and the youngest was merely two. Katalin Dér, who was born in Szeged in 1914, was also hospitalized and gave birth to her daughter, Zsuzsanna, on December 28, 1944, in the hospital at Malzgasse 16.²⁴

In these camps, the oldest and youngest inmates could usually work inside the camps and did not have to leave the camps to perform extremely hard labor in factories or help clear away rubble. There were even places where the elderly managed to provide regular instruction for the children.

The needs of the inmates in the various camps were met to varying degrees. In some places the inmates starved, but in others the camp commander gave permission to the older women who stayed in the camp during the day to cook for the inmates while the younger ones worked outside the camp. In camps in which supplies were scant, children had to leave the camp in secret and try to beg for food or food stamps from the people of Vienna, even if their command of German was weak. If caught, they were regularly severely punished. The memories related to being locked up for these activities have remained painful for many survivor children up to the present day.

The scary part was that during the bombing only elderly people and young children were at home. The abled-bodied people were working. (...) As a matter of fact one day my mother asked me to go out in the streets of Vienna and beg for food stamps from the Viennese people. (...) One day I went out to do this and the *Lagerführer* of the concentration camp caught me and she took me down to the cellar, to the bomb shelter, and locked me up in a dark room and she said she was going to kill me because I was not allowed to do that. (...) I was in this dark cellar, closed up mainly for two days without any food. (Pearl Zimmerman, Visual History Archive USC Shoah Foundation=VHA 40580)²⁵

23 Sándor Hargittai's memoir in István Hargittai, *Our Lives – Encounters of a Scientist* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2004), 56.

24 The card-indexes of the hospitals are in the Archiv IKG Wien, Bestand Wien, II/SOZ/Kartei/Ungarische Zwangsarbeit.

25 Special thanks for Anna Lujza Szász who researched, transcribed and translated the interview excerpts of the VHA.

From November 1944 onward, with the air raids becoming more and more frequent, the situation in the camps deteriorated dramatically. Numerous camps were bombed and many Hungarian Jewish slave laborers died as a consequence.

Plants of the War Industry, Municipal Public Utilities and Small Family Businesses

Those who were able to work had to leave the *Wohnlager* and go to plants of the war industry, such as Vienna's bread factory, the *Ankerbrotfabrik*, facilities used by construction companies like *Arnoldi*, *Papirfabrik ROJA*, etc.²⁶ The big factories had built barracks for POWs and forced laborers earlier inside the factories. Oftentimes, small family businesses also used slave laborers from the camps in tinker workshops, factories and workshops used in the food, clothing and shoe industry, etc. Municipal public utilities also exploited many Hungarian Jewish slave laborers: they were made to clear away snow and rubble, assist with the removal of debris and corpses from bombed buildings, clean cemeteries, etc.

The daily routine started in the camp [Wohnlager, 21. Kuenburggasse 1] and in Vienna in the early morning. At dawn, they gathered together the groups, [and the] foremen and the German armed guards in uniforms arrived. They took us to the workplaces. That year the daily routine in Vienna had already been disrupted by one thing: every morning, between 10 and 11 o'clock, the American bombers arrived and bombarded the city. There is also a story about this. If you asked what the time was, they answered: ten minutes before the air-raid alarm. (Testimony of Smuel Hoffman, Yad Vashem Archives=YVA, O3.12209)

During this period after November 1944, the very young and very old deportees were also taken out of the camps to clear away rubble. Many of them died in the course of this work as a consequence of collapsing buildings and repeated air raids. For example, eleven-year-old Sándor Hargittai, who was placed together with his mother, three-year-old brother, and three other relatives in the school-building at Bischoffgasse No. 10, became part of a special unit composed of twenty children between ten and fifteen years of age.

We went to bombed-out buildings right after the air raid. They used us to get into places where adults could not go. We had to carry out the corpses, the injured, and all the valuables. When we found only a

26 See the *Betriebe* menu, accessed October 7, 2015, at <http://www.ungarische-zwangsarbeit-in-wien.at/>.

limb or any other human body part, we had to carry those out too. (...) Several of us died when they fell from somewhere. They were replaced with even younger children.²⁷

Some of the slave laborers who had to work in the large plants involved in the war-industry were housed in barracks within the factories. In addition to *Flughafen Schwechat* outside of Vienna, these factories included, for example, *Saurer Werke Österreich AG*, *Shell Ölraffinerie*, *Ostmark Mineralölfabrik*, and *Heinkel Werke* in Lobau. In these camps, the Hungarian Jewish slave laborers often worked together with others, mainly French, Italian, and Russian prisoners of war. In many cases, the guards were also multinational: alongside the Austrian and German SS guards and Wehrmacht officers, there were also Ukrainian and Hungarian *Volksdeutsch* guards. The camps in the factories were usually strictly guarded complexes where the Hungarian Jewish slave laborers would receive help almost exclusively from prisoners of war.

Hospitals

Whereas in the majority of the plants related to the war industry, *Revier* had been set up earlier, after the arrival of the prisoners of war, the sick or injured deportees of the camps and the smaller workshops or factories were treated in Viennese hospitals, meaning the hospitals on Malzgasse (Malzgasse 7 and 16, in the 2nd district), the *Kinderspital* (Ferdinandstrasse 23, in the 2nd district) and the *Kinderheim* (Mohapelgasse 3, in the 2nd district), which were managed by the *Ältestenrat* of Vienna. In addition to these institutions, Jewish slave laborers were also given treatment at municipal hospitals (the *Allgemeines Krankenhaus*, *Infektionsspital*, *Koch-Spital*, *Krankenhaus Korneuburg*, *Krankenhaus Mödling*, *Meidling Notspital*, *Ottakringer Spital*, *Wilhelminen-Spital*). In these hospitals a large number of Hungarian Jewish slave laborers were treated.²⁸ We also know that Krumey charged the physicians among the deportees with the task of providing basic medical care in the camps of Vienna. Such physicians from the individual camps regularly sent reports to the Krumey-Commando. They also sent a number of

27 Sándor Hargittai's memoir in Hargittai, *Our Lives*, 55.

28 Lea Waller (born Visi), who was 15 years old in 1944, for example, was hospitalized with pleurisy. She was taken to the hospital from the *Wohnlager* at Hackengasse 11. She remembered her hospitalization as follows: "They called a German physician, who decided that I had to be taken to a hospital immediately, because my state was life-threatening. I did not have any infectious disease, only the complications of a common cold." See Lea Waller's testimony in Mordechai Anielewicz Memorial Holocaust Study and Research Center, Moreshet Archives=MA, A.1529.

sick people to hospitals. The Krumej-Commando paid 5 RM per day per capita to the *Ältestenrat* for the provisions for the sick deportees who were treated in the hospitals belonging to the *Ältestenrat*.²⁹ The money came from the earnings of the slave laborers, which they never received. The Nazis kept them in a separate bank account.

Rezső Kasztner visited the hospitals on Malzgasse on January 15, 1945, at which time 235 Jews were being given treatment there: 110 of them were Viennese and the rest were deportees from Hungary. The majority of the Hungarian Jewish slave laborers who were treated in the Malzgasse hospitals were hospitalized as a consequence of work-related accidents. However, there were numerous air raid victims among the patients as well. (As far as Kasztner knew, by the middle of January 1945, 64 Hungarian Jewish slave laborers had died and more than 200 had been wounded due to the air raids.)³⁰

According to the hospital registers, all in all, more than 1,000 Hungarian Jewish slave laborers were treated in various Viennese hospitals, and about 300 of them died.³¹ Testimonies, memoirs and hospital registers indicate that more than 30 babies were born to mothers who had been deported to Vienna in 1944–45, though some of the newborns had died by the time the city was liberated.

Magda Kallós lived in the *Wohnlager* on Bischoffgasse. Her son, Gábor, was born in a hospital on Malzgasse on October 9, 1944. Mária, Kallós's older daughter, born in 1929, who was also deported, remembered this as follows: "*My brother was born in Vienna in October [19]44. – And after that, every weekend, I took down the yellow star [and] ran away from the camp to see my mother and the child.*" (Mária Kallós, *Voices of the 20th Century Archive*=Voices 409_2_14)

The hospitals on Malzgasse also served as centers of religious life for the slave laborers. In the hospitals headed by physician-director Emil Tuchmann,³² a number of rabbis, cantors and ritual slaughterers who had been deported from Hungary found refuge. Zvi Kohn, the rabbi of Derecske, for example, was able

²⁹ Karsai–Molnár, *The Kasztner Report*, 283.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 289.

³¹ The card-indexes of the hospitals are in the Archiv IKG Wien, Bestand Wien, II/SOZ/Kartei/Ungarische Zwangsarbeit.

³² In October 1938, Tuchmann became head of the Jewish relief services in Vienna, and afterwards he was named director of public health services. He started working in the Jewish hospital in the summer of 1942 and became its director. He was also a member of the *Ältestenrat* until the end of the war. On Tuchmann's activity regarding the Hungarian Jews see: Ester Farbstein, "Jews on Ice: A Look Inside the Labor Camps in Austria," <http://www.misrachi.at/a/%20look%20inside%20the%20labor%20camps%20in%20austria.pdf>, accessed January 6, 2015.

to remain in the hospital from October 1944 up until the liberation of the city because Tuchmann had appointed him as camp rabbi. Kohn celebrated Seder in the bomb shelter of the hospital at the end of March 1945:

I conducted a Seder on two nights of Passover in the basement beit midrash. There were 150 people around the tables, and tears were pouring from everyone's eyes. Tuchmann himself sat with us at the Seder and wept. I expounded and explained the story of the Exodus from Egypt for the entire congregation in order to evoke great mercy. Just as God redeemed our ancestors, may He redeem us quickly in our days. (...) They said there had never been a Seder like this on Passover night in the city of Vienna. No one who took part in it will ever forget this Seder for the rest of his life.³³

Rezső Kasztner happened to be in Vienna at the time and was also among the participants.³⁴

The Hungarian Jewish slave laborers had much for which to thank to Franz Löw (1916–1997), who was employed by the IKG as a social worker from the 1930s onward. After 1938, she played an important role in rescuing Viennese Jews by providing them with false identity papers. From the summer of 1944, Löw devoted herself to helping Jewish slave laborers who had been deported from Hungary. She regularly gave them food and clothes, and she visited the camps to escort the sick to the hospitals.³⁵

Transportation in the City

As the last part of this topographical section of our inquiry, we wish to discuss the fact that Jewish Hungarian slave laborers also had to get around the city and often used public transport. When they were brought to their workplaces and taken back to the camps (e.g. from the *Wohnlager* on Hackengasse to *DEA Nova* in Schwechat) and also on their free days, if they got leave until sundown (e.g. permission to go from the *Wohnlager* on Bischoffgasse to the *Kinderspital*

33 Zvi Kohn, *Likutei Tsevi*, introduction, 21–22. Cited by Ester Farbstein, “Jews on Ice”.

34 Karsai–Molnár, *The Kasztner Report*, 305.

35 See Franz Löw's short bio in Maria Dorothea Simon, “Franz Löw (1916–1997),” *Soziale Arbeit* 7 (2013): 296–97; accessed January 6, 2015, <http://www.doew.at/erinnern/biographien/erzaehltes-geschichte/ns-judenverfolgung-ungarische-juedinnen-und-juden/franzen-danneberg-loew-einige-haben-wir-tot-aus-den-waggons-gezogen>.

to visit new-born children and their mothers), they could travel entirely legally within the city. However, some of them also traveled illegally. For instance, in spite of the odds, slave laborers managed to escape from the Lobau camp to Hackengasse. There were camps from which it proved relatively easy to escape when those who were able to work were in their workplaces. There were also more tightly guarded camps, such as in Lobau and Floridsdorf, but in order to find food, inmates regularly tried to escape from them as well. According to numerous interviews, deportees visited relatives who had been put in other camps. In order to do that, they often needed to travel by tram.

It was not allowed [to go outside], but we did it anyhow. We hid the yellow star and we started out on foot very early in the morning and we walked 6 kilometres until we reached Favoritenstrasse and there I asked how we could get to the Hackengasse. Somebody said that it was very far and at first, we have to go to the Südbahnhof and *von dort mit Tram weiter*. All right, we thanked him [or her, as it is not possible to know the gender from the Hungarian original] very much, and continued on foot. But he [or she] came with us and boarded the tram, bought the ticket [for us] and showed us where we had to get off. (Ilona Sima Bek, VHA 48943)



Map 2.: The Distance Between the Saurerwerke in Lobau and the Hackengasse Wohnlager
(© Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies 2014–2015)

Another example:

Then I went there every week. So I succeeded in maintaining contact with my mother. My grandparents, they did not dare to leave the lager. Now, we always had to do it illegally, this was obvious. And [for them,] to take off the star and anybody could see that we were lager dwellers. Now, [we were wearing] homemade trousers, pantaloons, made of blankets. In short, we were immensely elegant. But against the cold, it was good. (Mária Kallós, *Voices* 409_2_14)



Map 3.: The Distance Between the Bischoffgasse-Wohnlager and the Spital in Malzgasse
(© Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies 2014–2015)

Although the size of the city made it difficult for many who had been deported from small towns or villages to orient themselves, city life and public transportation enabled them to move about illegally more easily than they would have been able to do in smaller communities. On the other hand, complete escape from the camps was hindered precisely by the distinctive features of the unfamiliar city. With no contacts among the local population and at times a weak command of German, the deportees could have escaped only with great difficulty and immense personal risk. While a large number of people permanently escaped from the sizeable ghetto of Pest established in November 1944, the Hungarian Jewish slave laborers in Vienna and its vicinity tend to emphasize in their testimonies or memoirs that technically speaking they could have fled, but day after day they chose to return to the camp and their family members instead.

Everyday Life in Slave Labor

In the following section, we examine the socio-historical complexity of the phenomenon of Hungarian Jewish labor in Vienna. In the oral history sources on which we draw, there are noticeable repetitions and similarities that allow one to identify certain types of everyday communication and social relationships among the slave laborers and also between the slave laborers and the surrounding society. Presumably, this is not due simply to the monotony of everyday life, especially time spent working. Though we have not yet been able to analyze all of the available sources as thoroughly as we would have liked in order to have been able to provide as nuanced a portrait as possible of everyday life in the various Viennese camps and workplaces, we wish to keep the conceptual framework of historical anthropology in mind.³⁶ Our investigation follows the clusters below:

1. work
2. living conditions
3. in-group communication
4. out-group communication, namely, with Viennese neighbors, POWs, guards and other Nazi authorities, city institutions (e.g. hospitals), the city itself as a stranger (e.g., problems with orientation, the problems posed by a large urban environment for people from smaller communities), and language gaps.

Work

Narratives of work experience are often difficult to analyze in oral history research. Generally, repetitive experiences are seldom narrated as individual ‘stories.’ Rather they are told as ‘descriptions’ in which many individual experiences are compressed in a single picture.³⁷ Unfortunately, the interviewers

36 See especially the articles by Dorothee Wierling, “The History of Everyday Life and Gender Relations On Historical and Historiographical Relationships,” and Wolfgang Kashuba, “Popular Culture and Workers’ Culture as Symbolic Orders: Comments on the Debate about the History of Culture and Everyday Life,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 149–99.

37 See Gabriele Rosenthal, “Die Auswertung: Hermeneutische Rekonstruktion erzählter Lebensgeschichten,” In: Gabriele Rosenthal, ed., *“Als der Krieg kam, hatte ich mit Hitler nichts mehr zu tun”: Zur Gegenwärtigkeit des “Dritten Reiches” in erzählten Lebensgeschichten* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1990), 246–51; and Gabriele Rosenthal, “Reconstruction of Life Stories: Principles of Selection in Generating Stories for Narrative Biographical Interviews,” *The Narrative Study of Lives* 1 (1993): 59–91.

who participated in the biggest collections of Holocaust testimonies hardly ever asked for detailed descriptions of the work phases of a job. Survivor testimonies and oral history interviews were usually conducted in order to create a narrative of the individual's life, and they tended to focus on the experiences of suffering during periods of persecution. In our very special case, slave work was not the worst facet of everyday life: deportation, hunger, pandemics and bombardments put people's lives and wellbeing at far greater risk.³⁸

Last but not least, as mentioned, most of the interviewees were children or teenagers in 1944 who did not have to take part in slave labor and either were able to stay in the *Wohnlager* with their grandparents and the other children or performed their work together with their mothers or grandparents. However, we did find interviews done with children over 12 years of age who had had to work hard during their forced stay in Vienna.

We were working at the *Ostmarkwerke*. Ground-to-air missiles were produced there. We made four-wing missiles. My grandmother, my mother, my aunt and we, the two children, we all worked in the factory. (...) We, the children, had to carry components from one aircraft to the other with electric trucks. The driver of the truck was a Ukrainian. Two children between the ages of twelve and eighteen were assigned to serve on each truck. They had to put the wings of the missiles upon the truck and carry them to the next machine. (Efrajim Karmi, MA A1527)

Bad working conditions and poor nourishment increased the risk of accidents in the workplace. Mária Ember reported such an accident in her testimonies in the following manner:

38 This does not mean that slave labor in Vienna was an easy job. On the contrary, not young women and even children and grandparents had to do particularly hard and often dangerous work, as e.g. Smuel Hoffman remembers: "*Thus we mainly repaired the houses damaged by bombings. Also, fixed the roofs destroyed by air strikes. If I remember correctly six or seven of us, young people, were there with a Serbian prisoner overseer. He did not live with us in the camp, he only supervised us while we were working. I was among those who fixed the tile roof, thus I was crawling on 4–5 meter high buildings as a ropedancer. The others, approx. 30, were picking the tiles from the various approaching vehicles and gave them to us. They were bringing the tiles upon the stairway and we placed them on the roof. I did this for two months. (...) No one ever counted the hours. The work began when the sun was rising, thus the days were shorter in the winter and longer in the autumn. We were working from sunrise till half an hour before sunset. Since they wanted to avoid any attempt to escape during the dark we were taken back to the camp before the night fell.*" (Smuel Hoffman, YVA O3. 12209).

My mother was always a cleaning lady in the factory, thus she was sweeping the courtyard and I, who was thirteen years old then, was assigned as a worker to the smelting factory. Do not imagine a big factory! It had smaller iron stoves and hot, red iron was swirling out of them, which was then fixed by Austrian skilled workers and hammered while it was still in the state of glowing. It was very interesting and I was extremely interested in the factory. Then I was placed as a worker to the revolver turning-machine and I was very proud of that. In the end I was trained to be able to handle a drilling-machine, and I was standing next to a drilling-machine and working with it. There was no problem with the work as such; the only problem was that they barely gave us food. (...) We experienced a terrible weight loss. It happened with me that despite the fact that I was fond of work and was interested in the factory (...) I accidentally dozed off from time-to-time while I was working. I almost had an accident because the drilling-machine tore the arm of my coat off and I was very lucky that it did not drill into my arm. However, there was an older girl, approximately eighteen years old who was working on the crane and maybe the hunger and also the bad air which goes up, well there is no mountain air in the factory, she fainted on the crane, fell and broke her leg. Everyone erupted in excitement because the *Gestapo* came and checked on the place due to alleged sabotage. She was very close to being taken and executed. (Mária Ember, VHA 50257)³⁹

The working conditions largely depended on the behavior of the foremen in the factories. Both the testimonies and the protocols of the Austrian People's Court indicate a wide range of attitudes among the foremen and overseers.⁴⁰ In the following passage, Ilona Sima Bek talks about a Czech political prisoner who treated the young women in the factory mercilessly:

There were wooden-made, board shapes (concrete stones). The longest was 1 meter long and I was working in that one. It was 40 cm wide and 60 cm tall. We measured it because our idea was to make and run exactly the same factory back at home when we return. It was very cheap, coal ash and huge building blocks. There were smaller ones, half as big. Two women were working there. This was 139 kg pure, the four

39 Mária Ember published her novel based on her memories one year earlier than Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness* was published, see Ember, *Hajtűkanyar*.

40 Strafsache gegen Dr. Emil Tuchmann, Landesgericht Wien Dokumentationsarchiv Österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW 17142); Strafsache gegen Dr. Siegfried Seidl, Landesgericht Wien (DÖW 21053); Strafsache gegen Franz Knoll. (Landesgericht Wien, Vg 6a Vr 8267/46.).

pieces. And we had to carry each, the two of us, from one place to another when we took it out from the shape to let it dry. (...) But I was working very hard. If I was not working I was crying. I rather worked and my younger sister was working with the smaller stones, with the two women. And there were ten foremen; I reckon they were Czechs, political prisoners. They must have been Communists. This is why they were locked up there. They were the foremen and I was working with a Czech of this kind. This was such a terrible person. Before me another woman was working with him and he beat her. He beat the woman. Then she was not willing to work and in the end I was sent to him. When I was almost done with the whole thing, he destroyed it. To make me do it again. (Ilona Sima Bek, VHA 48943)

Living Conditions

The living conditions of slave laborers also differed widely. From the very beginning of their deportation, Hungarian Jews suffered from a lack of sufficient clothing because they had been forbidden to take items of clothing to the ghettos, and even if they had managed to smuggle some in, the items were taken from them in Strasshof. They had to work in the clothes and using the tools which they had been left with. The grim living conditions were only partially relieved by Franzi Löw and some decent employers who gave rugs and clothes to some families. Food was similarly scarce, although it made a substantial difference if the slave laborers were allowed to cook in the *Wohnlager*s or if the workplaces had canteens, and also if the slave laborers could reduce the shortage of food in any (usually illegal) way. The oral history interviews reveal that in general every member of a family was busy finding food, no matter how dangerous this was.

I was a little child and when I saw that everyone was begging for food through the fence once I stood there too. A German lady passed by and I also started begging her to give me a piece of bread. When I wanted to go back the guard caught me and asked: “Where have you been?” Then he noticed the bread in my hands. He took it and told me that he would lock me up for that. And then what happened? He took me to the shelter where there was a tight, small room full of garbage. He locked me in there. It was terrible. He even hit my head with his gun. He had a truncheon and he hit my head with that. Despite the fact that my head was bleeding I was locked in that storage. The door was closed and I was crying and begging the guards to let me out. I was extremely scared of the darkness. There were mice and rats too. Till

today, although many years have passed, I never sleep at home with the lights off. (...) And when my mother came back from work she heard that I was elsewhere. She approached the guard and begged him to let me free since I was too young. While the guard replied: “Tell her, if she dares to beg for food again something much worse will happen to her.” Then my mother came to set me free. (Mirjam Herstik, YVA O3. 12457)⁴¹

In-Group Communication

The families had to make genuine and determined efforts to organize “normal” everyday life in the *Wohnlagers*. Laundry, cooking, the nursing of infants, and providing care for the elderly, invalids and sick family members required a lot of energy from mothers who had to work outside the *Wohnlager* during the day. The eight-year old Peter Cukor and Gizella Nurnberg described the situation in the following way:

In the winter some of the people tried to organize a school for us but most of the women were working in the factories, so the ones who were there, were more like babysitters because everybody was worried, because all these boys and girls were together and some of them were like in their early teens and played all kinds of interesting games like doctors and things like that and everybody was worried about us. And this was a giant camp. (Peter Cukor, VHA 24303)

We were bored, we had no games or anything to do there, so between the second floor up, there was a gate and a huge window and we were curious what is happening behind that gate and behind that window. So we climbed up the stairs, of course not knowing that we were not allowed to do that and we somehow opened the window, we scrawled in and there was a paradise. An intellectual paradise. There were all

41 She told another typical story: “My mum was especially talented in acquiring food. They were in the forest where people often went to have picnics. My mother addressed them in German without any embarrassment and begged for food. Some of them were good people who took something out of their baskets: a bun or a piece of cookie. My mother always brought something. (...) We ate everything no matter whether it was a pig or --- anything. The main point was to always have food. Later our situation was getting better because the women were not going to the forests of Vienna to work but to the *Ankerbrotfabrik* in our neighbourhood. That Viennese bread factory was an actual town and the Jewish women were taken there to work. My mother of blessed memories wore a pair of trousers; she tied its legs and filled it with warm buns. When she came back from work it seemed irreverent to ask: ‘Mama have you bought something?’ Everything she got there, more precisely, everything she took from there was first given to the elderly people. And when we asked she replied: ‘Children. You are children, but here are old people and they need food more’.” (Mirjam Herstik, YVA O3. 12457).

kind of dried animals in bottles. It was like a research place of the high school and all kinds of weeds and flowers preserved in certain liquid and it was like a dream world and we were in quotation happy. You know it gave us time to forget that we were hungry. (Gizella Nurnberg, VHA 33187)

It was almost impossible to lead a normal religious life in the camps. The slave laborers typically had to work on Saturdays (and sometimes also on Sundays), and even if this was not the case, Shabbat was the only day on which they could do all the domestic work. Religious families, despite the difficulties, aimed to adhere to religious prescriptions and practices, if only on a basic level. From time to time, this resulted in strong frictions between religious and non-religious men. As the young girl Ilona Sima Bek observed:

Well, there were men in the group too, mainly older men who were religious, and only a few of them who weren't. Every morning we had to fence off a corner. This was the church. There was an old men called Altman who got up every morning—he died here—at six o'clock and was strolling among the beds saying: "Good morning my suffering brothers! I ask those gentlemen who wish to pray to get up, the bell will ring soon and the work shall be started." Then those who were not religious started shouting: "Stupid fellow, shout your mouth! He doesn't let us sleep although we could sleep a little bit more." (Ilona Sima Bek, VHA 48943)

Outgroup Activities and Communication with the Outside World

In the testimonies we found a subtle and sometimes puzzling ethnic hierarchy in the slave laborers' perception of the outside world. At the top of this hierarchy were the gallant, handsome and helpful Italian and French prisoners of war. Viennese foremen and the Viennese population in general also tended to be considered cooperative and helpful. The positive attitudes of *Wehrmacht* officers were occasionally also mentioned. Yet, according to the testimonies, Ukrainian overseers and guards were at the bottom of this ethnic hierarchy. In their narratives of arrival in Strasshof, almost everyone mentioned the brutality of the male and female Ukrainian guards, while the picture of ethnic Germans from Hungary was more mixed. First, let us give two examples regarding the French and Italian prisoners of war:

French prisoners of war also worked there in the demesne, now, they were men—were not they?—and they got together with the Jewish women and, now, the prettier women all had a French man. Well, some went along with the French man to this point, some to that, but they visited us every weekend. My mother had a French man called Rave, [and] I know that they merely showed each other photos: he about his wife and my mother about her husband. And they always said that *ce lager*, *ce lager*. However, there were nice girls as well, and all sorts of great love affairs also took place. The French men came with mandolins in the weekends [and] they played [the instruments], sang, [and] danced. I remember that we were more than ten children, and one of the boys in the outer part of the cowshed, behind the cow's backsides taught us to *shimli*. Then I remember one New Year's Eve. The French were playing music and men and women were dancing and suddenly the overseer rushed in with a Gestapo officer. There was very loud shouting: "Line up!" They threatened us with all sorts of penalties, [such as] we will be taken away immediately and I do not know what else. Nota bene, not much later, those who looked the strongest among us were really taken away for, so to say, digging trenches, and I remember that way that none of them came back. And then of course we had to stop the New Year's Eve party. (Bárdos Judit, VHA 51638)

And another testimony:

I was working in the street and it happened you know I was looking around what is there and I was not working very hard because the three Italians were helping me. "Sit down, you don't have to work, we work on behalf of you." Sometimes the SS came and asked "Why are you sitting?" And then the Italian came and asked "What do you want?" They were fighting you know, the Italians, they said "Listen we do the work for this lady!" and the SS disappeared. They felt ashamed sometimes you know when somebody told in their faces what they were doing. (Rose Czeizler-Visontay, VHA 2677)

As mentioned in the first part of this essay, by the time the Hungarian Jews arrived in Vienna the Viennese Jews had already been persecuted and deported from the city. Between 1939 and 1942, of the 181,000 Viennese Jews, 60,000 were murdered in concentration and extermination camps.⁴² Only 5,500 Austrian Jews survived the Holocaust in the territory of Austria. We do not wish

42 For the history of the Jews under the Nazi regime in Vienna see e.g. Doron Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht Wien 1938–1945: Der Weg zum Judenrat* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2001).

to hazard any explanation for the huge difference between the attitudes of the non-Jewish citizens of Vienna towards their Jewish neighbors and, some years later, the Hungarian Jews. What is clearly noticeable is that almost all of the survivors refer to some fabulous episode, in which ordinary Viennese people came to their aid, usually by providing them with food.

In the middle of January, there were heavy snowfalls, and the entire group was taken to the Danube-side to shovel snow. We got shovels and we had to shovel the snow into the Danube. Street sweepers from the municipality supervised us and demanded quick work from us, so they did not have to work. Here, I and my cousin managed to escape and hide in the staircase of a bomb-damaged house, because we were very cold. After a while, one of the residents came home. He [or she] entered the lift and came back with milk and slices of bread with margarine. He [or she] gave us food and drink and asked us to place the milk bottle next to the lift afterwards. His [or her] deed was a life-saving act for us, because we had already been completely drenched and frozen in the cold. Outside it was minus 15 degrees and the wind was cold. (Eva Eisler, MA 1517)

We close this section with one particularly interesting excerpt:

And one day, it had already been a week I was working there, I went to the corridor to do some kind of little work and some blond lady opened the door and pushed me in. “Come in! Listen darling, we are not Hitlerists, we are Social Democrats. And if you pass this door, you can come in and have a coffee and sit there. We wait for the Allies or the Russians to come! We help you, all of you!” Can you believe it? I was sitting in the flat, in the kitchen and had a hot coffee. (Rose Czeizler-Visontay, VHA 2677)⁴³

43 For a comparable recollection, see the following part of Stephen Berger’s testimony: “*It was a Sunday. The Austrians were not working in the factory so we were doing cleaning up job on Sunday when nobody was in the factory. And I was sweeping the yard of the factory, and next to the yard there was an apartment house, about 5–6 storeys apartment house. And as I was cleaning, it was a quiet Sunday; I heard something behind me fall. I looked back and I see a brown paper bag. So I went there, picked up the paper bag, I look inside and I see a sandwich. So I looked up where the bag came from and I saw on the 3rd or the 4th floor and elderly woman in the window and she is motioning to me. Then I found a note in the bag saying if I could come upstairs. Well, not in that Sunday but the following Sunday sometimes I sneak out from the camp, went around the corner and went upstairs. There was that old woman, invites me in her apartment she gives me food, freshly cooked food on the table, I eat and she wanted to know who I am, where I come from and then I see on top of a table the photograph of a young German in a German uniform, so I started to be very uncomfortable and she saw me looking at the photograph and she tells me that is her son. She says he disappeared on the Russian front. She says I hope if anybody finds him, hope*”

The Last Stages

As we have shown, the beginnings of the relatively short episode of Viennese slave labor for Jews deported from Hungary in 1944 resemble the deportation of the Jews from the Hungarian provinces: the ghettoization and the deportation process of the Jews who ended up in Vienna and its vicinity were not different from the processes involved in the deportation of those who were eventually taken to Auschwitz. Then, however, for almost a year, those who by chance happened to be deported in the cattle cars destined for Strasshof were incomparably more fortunate than those who were deported to Auschwitz where their majority was gassed upon arrival. The ‘deconcentrated’ concentration camps in the large city provided better chances of survival than other settings. However, even during this late phase of the war, a large number of deportees from among the slave laborers in Vienna and its vicinity perished as a consequence of starvation, inhumane working conditions, and air raids. Furthermore, in the last months, some of the slave laborers were again taken to Strasshof, from where they were deported to Bergen-Belsen or Theresienstadt. Some of them, mainly the able-bodied men, were taken back under the command of *Organisation Todt* to help build the *Südostrwall*. If they survived, they ended up being deported to Mauthausen and its satellite camps. Many of them perished during the forced marches or in the aforementioned camps. Moreover, people were taken on death marches not only from Strasshof but also directly from the Viennese camps.⁴⁴ 17-year-old Victor Farkas, for instance, lost his grandfather during the death march:

When the [death] march came we all decided now we have to try to escape. (...) And that time we all left, my mother and I and my grandfather first fell behind trying to do so, because as we went through Vienna more and more Jews had to come and the group was getting larger and larger and much more difficult to control. So as we fell behind we thought we had made it and then we were captured and then again pushed back in. (...) Our problem was my grandfather. And

treats him with the same kindness I am treating you. So I realized the motif of her giving me sandwich because in her mind and conscious figured ‘maybe my son needs somebody’s kindness somewhere wherever he is’.” (Stephen Berger, VHA 3781).

44 Eleonore Lappin, “Das Massaker von Hofamt Priel,” in *Ungarisch-jüdische Zwangsarbeiterinnen und Zwangsarbeiter in Niederösterreich 1944/45*, ed. Eleonore Lappin, Susanne Uslu-Pauer, and Manfred Wieninger (St. Pölten: 2006), 103–32; and Eleonore Lappin, “Die Opfer von Hofamt Priel. Namen, Tagebücher und autobiographische Berichte,” in *Ungarisch-jüdische Zwangsarbeiterinnen*, 133–73.

one day we fall behind again we couldn't keep up, actually when we were captured we were pushed back into the group and we were forced to march faster and faster to catch up with the group and he couldn't make it. And he was taken away. That was the last time I saw him. So my mother and I we went with the group, we tried again and it didn't work and we were marched all the way to Mauthausen. (Victor Farkas, VHA 5334)

Conclusions: The Vienna Paradox

In developing a map of slave labor in Vienna, we have been confronted with several historical, epistemological and methodological questions, which unfortunately could not be fully explored in this paper because they would need further investigation. For instance, from the historical point of view, we know neither how the entrepreneurs requested manpower nor how these entrepreneurs were selected by the Nazi authorities. It also remains unclear how and why the living conditions differed from place to place. An accurate overview of the division of labor and the power hierarchy among the various authorities would also require further research. From the epistemological point of view, the history of slave labor in Vienna became part of the so-called Strasshof phenomenon in the Holocaust historiography. We know, however, that Strasshof was only the starting point of the story. Over the course of the last decade, the commemoration of Strasshof has developed year by year, whereas a similar process has not even started in Vienna, where the slave laborers actually spent some eight to ten months. This chapter of the Holocaust happened toward the very end of World War II, and the impending defeat caused extreme reactions on the part of both the local Nazi authorities and the Viennese civilians, but we continue to lack an adequate grasp of the impact of timing on the fates of the slave laborers. Last but not least, we have been confronted with methodological problems. How can one construct informative and reliable narratives of the everyday lives of the Hungarian slave laborers in Vienna if virtually the only available sources are fragmented interviews conducted with people who survived the Holocaust as children?

However, while studying the history of Hungarian Jewish slave labor in Vienna, we realized that there are numerous contradictions and unusual moments in the story in comparison with the social history of concentration camps in the Third Reich. This uncommon face of slave labor might be termed

the *Vienna paradox*. The main (and interconnected) components of this paradox are as follows:

1. The Hungarian Jews first arrived in Vienna at a time when Viennese Jews, who had represented one of the biggest European Jewish communities before 1938, had already been deported from the city. However, in 1944, there were approximately 6,000 Jews (mainly “Mischlinge”) still living in city. There were some shared places, i.e. the Jewish hospital, *Kinderspital* and the *Altersheim* at Malzgasse 7 and 16, which served as meeting point for them. Furthermore, the Hungarian deportees benefitted from the infrastructure of the *Ältestenrat* with regard to medical services and welfare.

2. The events we were trying to reconstruct took place in the last year of World War II when it was becoming increasingly clear that Nazi Germany would lose the war. This had a significant influence on the attitudes and behavior of the Viennese population toward Hungarian Jews: openness and readiness to engage in help and cooperation seems to have grown day by day.

3. Two or three generations of Hungarian Jews arrived in Strasshof and then in Vienna as members of families, even though most of these families did not include men of working age because they had already been sent to perform slave labor at the frontlines. Nevertheless, children, mothers and grandparents lived and worked together and basic forms of family life could thus be maintained, something that would have been impossible in a concentration camp. The unusual opportunity to maintain family bonds as part of everyday life clearly helped most of them survive the inhumane living conditions.

4. Hungarian Jewish slave labor in Vienna can be understood as a kind of ‘decentralised concentration,’ which resulted in a wide variety of living conditions and opportunities to survive. When consulting the sources, we were repeatedly reminded that the conceptual apparatus of urban history overlaps with our Holocaust study.

5. Hungarian Jewish slave labor constituted a transnational experience for all its participants. Hungarian slave laborers lived in a German-speaking environment and their language skills affected their abilities to communicate both ‘legally’ and ‘illegally’ in the city. Members of families who worked in big military factories often met or worked alongside French, Italian, and Russian prisoners of war, as well as so-called *Ostarbeiter*.

6. The SS guards were sometimes recruited from among Ukrainians or ethnic Germans from Hungary. Perceptions of the relationship between the non-Austrian and non-Reich SS guards and the Hungarian Jews were tinted by

ethnic prejudices in the eyes of the Hungarian Jews: in the testimonies they tend to describe the nature of these encounters in the framework of ethnic stereotypes. This cognitive framework helped them establish a range of behavioral differences, from cooperation all the way to physical violence.

Epilogue

Whereas the chances of survival were better in Vienna than in the death camps, the beginning and end of the story of the Jewish Hungarian slave laborers deported from Hungary to Strasshof (their ghettoization, deportation, and death marches) were both practically identical with key elements of the Holocaust “grand narrative.” What happened to Jewish slave laborers in Vienna cannot be detached from the experience of the Holocaust in Europe. The story of the Strasshof deportation is often connected to the Auschwitz-universe, for instance in the following recollection of one of the survivors:

I didn't have my glasses when I started to work in this machine shop. You know I remember I told you how crowded we were in the cattle car, I couldn't move. Well during those 3,5 days of cattle car somehow my eyeglasses fell off and I just couldn't bend down to retrieve it. Somebody stepped on them and broke them. So I arrived to this factory and I didn't have my eyeglasses. I was near-sighted. After a while I was working in this machine shop I said to the foreman one day, “Maybe you can help me to get eyeglasses.” He said, you know, “how can I get new eyeglasses?” (...) He said, “let me talk to the camp commander, let's see maybe he can come up with something.” That camp commander was a fairly decent fellow. He was a Czechoslovak. (...) So a few days later he comes back and says “this is what we are going to do. I give you an address in Vienna, you go there and maybe they can help you with the eyeglasses. The only thing is that you have to remove your yellow star, we give you money for the tram, they had the tram going in Vienna, but if you get caught outside we don't know anything about you.” It was a risky business to be caught without documents. With no yellow star you are an escapee and the consequences were very grave. But I thought about it and took a chance. I went and it turned out to be the old Jewish *Allgemeine Krankenhaus*, in the old Jewish Centre in Vienna. I went in, there was a short man who came to receive me and said “You want eyeglasses?” I said “yes.” He was very surprised to see me and he wanted to know how I got to Vienna and from where. I told them we were Hungarian Jews deported here, working in this factory and it

turned out that he was an old Viennese Jewish doctor who was put in charge of this section. So he leads me into a room, in a long room and in the room there were tables in neat rows and on the top of the tables in boxes they had eyeglasses. Thousands. As far as I could see, down the rows, I have never seen so many eyeglasses in my life. I go in and said, “My God, where all the eyeglasses are coming from?” “You don’t know? They come from Auschwitz.” (Stephen Berger, VHA 3781)

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