

Historical Documentation in the Cold War

The History of Jenő Lévai's Book, *Eichmann in Hungary* (1961)

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HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION IN THE COLD WAR. THE HISTORY OF JENŐ LÉVAI'S BOOK EICHMANN IN HUNGARY (1961)

Máté Zombory¹

The historical impact of Eichmann's trial is due to several factors, among which the personal actions of the accused in relation to the Jewish genocide were far from the most important. Paradoxically, interest in Eichmann has been affected at least as much, if not more, by the contemporary "affairs" of the time than by his active participation in the Jewish genocide.² There are at least two features of this particular history of reception. One is that the contemporary Hungarian aspects of the trial have faded. Until early 1961—when Israel's attorney general Gideon Hausner ordered a refashioning of the concept of the case so as to make an epic presentation of the Holocaust in its entirety³—the "Hungarian episode" of Eichmann's deadly activity was of primary significance for the prosecution. Because the accused directed the deportations in person only from Hungary, the investigating police body, aiming to establish Eichmann's direct responsibility, focused on Hungary.⁴ For the very same reasons, evidence from Hungary and knowledge about the 1944 anti-Jewish operations seemed to be essential to the case. Influenced by Israeli political aims, Hausner's approach exaggerated Eichmann's significance and diverted attention away from actions of his that it would have been possible to prove on the basis of contemporary historical knowledge about Nazi extermination policy.⁵ Another feature is that the trial's significance is inseparable from its influential interpretations, among which Hannah Arendt's report on the "banality of Evil" is the most famous.⁶ This article aims to fill this dual gap by focusing on the Hungarian element of contemporary "pre-Arendt" interpretations.

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- 1 Associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, senior research fellow at the Centre for Social Science–HAS Centre for Excellence. This study was funded by a postdoctoral grant from the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah.
 - 2 David Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a 'Desk Murderer'* (DaCapo Press, 2007).
 - 3 Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann*, pp. 249–51.
 - 4 Hanna Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004).
 - 5 Ruth Bettina Birn, "Fifty Years After: A Critical Look at the Eichmann Trial," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 44, no. 1–2 (2011): 443–74.
 - 6 See François Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence: Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).

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The Israeli police body's summary report of February 14, 1961 "provided a list of foreign experts who either helped personally with the investigation or whose books were extremely useful. They include Reitlinger, Robinson, Jeno Lavai [*sic*] and Kempner."⁷ Gerard Reitlinger, an art historian, was the author of one of the first general accounts of the Nazi extermination policy;⁸ renowned jurist Jacob Robinson worked as senior advisor for the prosecution and published a book about the trial in 1965 as a critical response to Arendt;⁹ and lawyer Robert M. W. Kempner served as assistant U.S. chief counsel during the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg and remained a prominent figure in relation to the documentation of Nazi war crimes, as his 1961 documentary book on Eichmann clearly testifies.¹⁰ Journalist and autodidact historian Jenő Lévai (1892–1983) fits perfectly into this company. Not only was he engaged in the historical documentation of the Jewish genocide, but he was also in contact with Reitlinger and Kempner in relation to the same. His book *Eichmann in Hungary: Documents*, published in German, English, and French, came out in 1961, a few weeks after the hearing had started.¹¹ The following study of Lévai's book will shed light on the social conditions of historical documentation, particularly on the institutional aspects and the political context. The perspective applied here has two major characteristics. First, it the person of Lévai in preparing the book, focusing especially on the relationship he cultivated with the Hungarian authorities; second, it deals with the trajectory of his manuscript from submission to publication. This dual focus allows the shedding of light on how large-scale Cold War tensions influenced individual actions in a state socialist country with regard to the historical documentation of Nazi atrocities.

The author

Born in 1892, Lévai came from an assimilated Jewish family. It was probably his father who Magyarized the family name in 1881. His mother, who grew up in Vienna, spoke only German at the time of her marriage, so her

7 Yablonka, *The State of Israel*, p. 75.

8 Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (New York: The Beechhurst Press, 1953).

9 Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight. The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1965).

10 Robert M. W. Kempner, *Eichmann und Komplizen* (Zurich, Stuttgart, Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1961).

11 Jenő Lévai, *Eichmann in Ungarn: Dokumente* (Budapest: Pannonia Verlag, 1961); *Eichmann in Hungary: Documents* (Budapest: Pannonia Press, 1961); *Eichmann en Hongrie. Documents* (Budapest: Éditions Pannonia, 1961).

children became bilingual. During the interwar period, as an acknowledged opposition journalist with strong public interest, Lévai dealt with the issue of anti-Semitism only as a matter of the regime breaching its civil contract with its citizens. Although, due to his family, he probably did not lack a Jewish religious environment, as a proud Hungarian he was not active in the Jewish world of Budapest.¹²

His artistic voice and historiographic style, so characteristic of his post-World War II work, developed as a consequence of two major life experiences.¹³ The first was the “national tragedy” of the Great War and the collapse of Greater Hungary. Lévai’s historical publication activity started as a response to his World War I and prisoner of war (PoW) experiences between 1914 and 1920. In 1915 the Russian army captured him as an Austro-Hungarian soldier and took him to Krasnoyarsk in Siberia. He started collecting documents as a journalist in the PoW camp. A decade after his return from Russia in 1920, he managed to get this collection of documents into Hungary, and in 1932 published a memoir about his experiences during the siege of Przemyśl. His subsequent three-volume “historical reportage” based on his war, PoW, and “hinterland” experience as an opposition journalist was an enormous commercial success. By the end of the 1930s this had enabled Lévai to build up a modest empire in the Hungarian media market that included a daily newspaper and a publishing house.

Lévai’s other formative experience was discriminatory anti-Semitic legislation that questioned his equal status as a citizen and as a member of the Hungarian nation. Because of the so-called second anti-Jewish law in 1939, he qualified as a Jew and was deprived of his publishing house and journals. Due to his status as a war veteran, however, he was able to keep and run a weekly magazine, but with the—for him, disgraceful—qualification on the cover page: “Jewish paper.” By using the connections associated with his journal, in 1942 Lévai started an initiative to support the forced labor battalions at the Eastern Front, for which he was tried for treason the following year. In 1944 he too was forced to work, but finally, at the end of the year, went into hiding. He survived the siege of Budapest in one of the “protected houses” under the auspices of the Swedish embassy. These two formative experiences resulted in his engagement with historical documentation and the application of a Hungarian-Jewish perspective.

12 On Lévai’s family background and journalism, see János Dési, *Lévai Jenő és a zsidósors* (Budapest: Citoyen, 2017).

13 Máté Zombory, “A nemzeti tragédia narratívái: Lévai Jenő, az írás és a történelem (1932-1948),” *Múltunk*, no. 2 (2018): 197–236.

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At the request of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lévai worked on Hungary's official preparations for the Paris peace treaty between 1945 and 1947. This allowed him to access official wartime documentation and the proceedings of war crimes trials, and to undertake research missions abroad, primarily to the embassies of neutral countries. Due to his personal connections facilitated by his "Jewish paper" during the early 1940s, Lévai could also rely on Jewish sources. Following nearly a dozen publications in the immediate aftermath of the war, a synthesis of his research appeared as a book in 1948 under the title *Jewish Fate in Hungary. The Era of Persecutions*.¹⁴ This book served as the basis for his *Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry*,¹⁵ published the same year by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at a Zürich-based publishing house. For more than three decades, Lévai's *Black Book* remained the one and only internationally accessible monograph on the Holocaust in Hungary. This, together with his many state-supported missions abroad, provided Lévai with valuable contacts with institutions and individuals engaged in the history and justice of the Jewish tragedy. Another outcome was that the archival collection in his own possession grew significantly.

The Stalinist takeover impacted seriously, but not irrevocably, on Lévai's work. In 1951 he was on a list of residents to be relocated to the Hungarian countryside from his apartment in a Rose Hill villa on the Buda side of the city—yet eventually he was able to remain there with his wife.¹⁶ Further, Lévai was partially affected by the internal purges of the state security services a couple of years later. In the 1953 anti-Zionist proceedings one accusation against the former members of the Jewish Council in Budapest was that they had concealed their own responsibility in committing "crimes against the people"¹⁷ against Jews by commissioning Lévai to write a book on the Budapest ghetto.¹⁸ Though his name was included on a custody proposal dated March 1, 1953,¹⁹ Lévai himself was ultimately not arrested.

Very little is known about exactly when and how Lévai resumed his work

14 Jenő Lévai, *Zsidósors Magyarországon. Az üldözések kora* (Budapest: Magyar Téka, 1948).

15 Jenő Lévai, *Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry* (Zurich: Central European Times Pub. Co., 1948).

16 In the early 1990s, Tamás Stark compiled a list of what remained of Lévai's archive at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences. He listed an item "Jenő Lévai's appeal against being forcefully translocated, 1951." Unfortunately, even this remaining part of Lévai's archive was eventually lost. I am grateful to János Dési for providing me with this list.

17 On this legal category, introduced by the ministerial decree related to the people's jurisdiction in 1945, see Tamás Hoffmann, "Crimes Against the People—a Sui Generis Socialist International Crime?" *Journal of the History of International Law*, 21 no. 2 (2019): 299–329.

18 Jenő Lévai, *A pesti gettó csodálatos megmenekülésének hiteles története* ([Budapest]: Officina, [1946]).

19 See Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security [Allambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, hereafter ÁBTL] V-101890/6/A.

of historical documentation. What is certain is that in 1957 he made “a longer research trip” to Switzerland and France.²⁰ His study might have been related to the Israeli affair stirred up around Rudolf Kasztner, who, as a representative of the Relief and Rescue Committee, an informal Zionist organization, had negotiated with Eichmann in 1944 in Budapest. In 1953 the Minister for Trade and Industry—as the employer of Kasztner—brought a case for slander against an Israeli of Hungarian origin who had publicly accused Kasztner of collaboration with the Nazis. The verdict in the trial went against Kasztner, and the judge, Benjamin Halevi, stated that the accused had “sold his soul to the devil.” Kasztner was shot dead on the street on March 3, 1957. In 1958 the Supreme Court reversed the judgment and found Kasztner not guilty on every count.

Following the first instance verdict in 1955, there was considerable international demand for documents about the Nazi–Zionist talks in Budapest in 1944. Not only did the head of the Soviet embassy in Tel Aviv and the representatives of the Israeli Communist Party make a request to Hungary for potentially revealing documents compromising Zionism and the Israeli government,²¹ but so did the defense counsel in the trial.²² Given that the Hungarian authorities did not find any useful archival material relating to the matter,²³ it is not impossible that one reason for Lévai’s mission abroad was to collect potentially compromising documents about the Nazi–Zionist negotiations of 1944. He was an expert in the case, having essential contacts with people who could provide access to further material.²⁴ Lévai’s years of cooperating with the Hungarian government earlier on also support this presumption.

Anyhow, while in Switzerland, Lévai was approached by the state prosecutor’s office in Hessen. Fritz Bauer’s office had already launched the investigation into the “Hungarian crime complex,” in which former SS officers, many of them Eichmann’s direct entourage in Hungary, were implicated. In December 1957 Lévai gave sworn testimony against Hermann Krumej, Eichmann’s deputy in Hungary, and transmitted material on the whole case to the West German prosecutors in Germany.²⁵ Importantly, Hungarian authorities in 1957 were also active in bringing Krumej to justice, especially the Committee of

20 “Újabb dokumentumok a náci magyarországi rémuralmáról,” *Magyar Nemzet*, January 31, 1958.

21 Note: “Anyagkérés a Kasztner perhez,” Tel Aviv, August 12, 1955, Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, hereafter MNL OL) XIX-J-1-j-Izrael-30/c-006326/2-1955 (11.d.).

22 S. M. Tamir’s letter to the Hungarian legation in Tel Aviv, November 5, 1955, MNL-OL, XIX-J-1-j-Izrael-30/c-006326/4-1955 (11.d.).

23 János Veres to the Hungarian legation in Tel Aviv, December 26, 1955, *ibid.*

24 See Jenő Lévai, *Zsidósors Európában* (Budapest: Magyar Téka, 1948).

25 Hessian State Archives (Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Wiesbaden), Bestand 461, No. 33538.

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the Persecutees of Nazism, a division of the Hungarian Partisan Alliance, and the National Representation of Hungarian Israelites.

By the end of the 1950s the most important aspects of Lévai's activity had been developed: his internationally acknowledged status in the early historiography of the Jewish catastrophe, due to his *Black Book*; his embeddedness in the Hungarian and international network of actors and institutions interested in bringing former Nazi perpetrators to justice or in the history of their atrocities; a large and ever-growing private archive of related material; and a position in post-Stalinist Hungary that enabled him to travel and study abroad. This last feature suggests that the Cold War provided him with the space to work and publish because of the renewed political and ideological interest in the Nazi persecution of the Jews. The fact that Lévai took part in revelatory campaigns against prominent figures from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) with a tainted past—such as Theodor Oberländer²⁶ and Hans Globke²⁷—might easily be interpreted as the price to be paid for the opportunity to work on the history of the Holocaust. However, the picture is far more complicated than that. On the one hand, Lévai's interest was not at all restricted to the writing of history. Neither his background in journalism nor his experiences would have allowed him the privilege of dealing only with historical matters. He also wanted justice to be done. These were precisely the political and jurisprudential interests that provided the conditions for historical documentation. On the other hand, Lévai's position was significantly multifaceted and varied according to the audience he addressed. His relation to the Hungarian state/party was ambiguous. He was neither a collaborator nor a dissident. Though the Hungarian state security service “was concerned with former journalist Jenő Lévai with an operative purpose” in 1959,²⁸ there is neither proof of his being employed and/or registered as an informant at the State Security Archives in Budapest (Állambiztonsági Iratok Történeti Levéltára, ÁBTL), nor proof of his collaboration with the East German state security at the Stasi Records Agency (Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen

26 Former Nazi politician, Federal Minister of Displaced Persons, Refugees and War Victims between 1953 and 1960. The German Democratic Republic's campaign in 1959–60 accused him of involvement in the Lviv Massacre of 1941. In 1960 he was sentenced *in absentia* to life imprisonment by an East German court. Oberländer resigned from his post in the first days of May 1960.

27 Lawyer, working at the Reich Ministry of the Interior. Hans Globke was co-author of the first commentary on the anti-Jewish Nuremberg laws in 1936. From 1953 to 1963, Globke served as Federal Secretary of State and Chief of Staff in the West German Chancellery. Not long before his retirement in autumn 1963, Globke was tried and convicted *in absentia* by the East German Supreme Court for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity during the war.

28 Note on the report of “Doktor” on April 9, 1959 (ÁBTL M-21589).

Republik, BStU). He was, however, in contact with the Hungarian state security, the main organ of historical documentation about the Nazi atrocities, and he did occasionally report to the service. Was Lévai a fellow traveler? Though he was occupied with providing and disseminating knowledge about the anti-Jewish persecutions and their perpetrators from a non-communist perspective, he indeed agreed with many aspects of the campaigns against the “re-fascistification” of the FRG. As I will show in this study, escalating Cold War tensions, together with the strong Hungarian implications of the case, actually enabled him to publish *Eichmann in Hungary*. I will also demonstrate how the very same features determined the reception of the book.

The commission

Reports by state security informants prove that at the end of the 1950s Lévai was boasting that he was working on a voluminous work of international relevance which would be published, *inter alia*, in Jerusalem.²⁹ He was in contact with Yad Vashem at the time with respect to the publication, and even solicited Israel in vain for a passport.³⁰ Lévai’s great moment soon came, when, on May 23, 1960 Israeli prime minister Ben Gurion announced the capture of Eichmann. Beyond its Cold War ideological relevance, for the leadership in Hungary, a country deeply affected by Adolf Eichmann’s activity, leaving the whole issue unaddressed was not an option.³¹

It was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that first tackled the implications of the rapidly evolving international affair. Ferenc Esztergályos, deputy head of the 2nd Territorial (Political) Department was and remained the brains of the Hungarian foreign policy strategy until Eichmann’s execution two years later. Born in 1927, Esztergályos joined the party following his graduation in 1945, and stepped onto the diplomatic career track from the intelligence service in the early 1950s. He moved to his office at the Ministry from the Hungarian legation in Vienna in 1960, at the age of 33. Following Eichmann’s capture, Esztergályos consciously worked on the creation of an institutional framework in which the topical aspects of the case would be discussed and the strategic steps decided by the respective parties. Not only did he try

29 See the report of “Xavér” on March 13, 1959 (ÁBTL M-37478/147), and of “Doktor” on April 9, 1959 (ÁBTL M-21589).

30 Note on the report of “Doktor” on April 9, 1959 (ÁBTL M-21589).

31 On Hungary’s role in the international Eichmann affair, see Máté Zombory, “Status Competition for the Historical Legacy of World War II: Eastern Europe and the Second Wave of War Crimes Trials,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* (forthcoming).

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to create an inter-ministerial coordination body to oversee the Hungarian foreign policy strategy in the Eichmann affair, but he was also the source of the idea to form a common bloc-level platform to ensure the coherence and efficacy of the respective countries' actions.³²

Esztergályos defined the general strategic goal as "forming an antifascist front, common joint action against the neo-fascist currents, applied and sharpened to West Germany."³³ Given that Israel had semi-officially already approached the respective socialist countries requesting support for the investigation, one focus was on the relation to Israel. Esztergályos was against Hungary's "rigid retention," since, he argued, this would prevent the opportunity to achieve the above-described main aims. He urged the rapid clarification of questions of international law in relation to the case so that a decision could be made about acknowledging the jurisdiction of the Israeli court. Another focus was on the definition of the trial's scope. Since the whole affair was deeply embedded in the ongoing Cold War struggle (especially the "German question" and the second Berlin crisis), the ideological potential for the socialist countries lay in the incrimination of Eichmann's accomplices, especially those at large in the FRG. Esztergályos defined the related tasks according to the perception that Israel might and possibly would use the case to blackmail the FRG with Eichmann's compromising testimony in order to obtain West German economic and political support.³⁴ Because "it is to be feared" that the "essential side of the case gets lost," Esztergályos saw the main task as preventing "possible attempts to one-sidedly present the case." The first point of "Our tasks" listed the "options available to us": on the one hand, "extensive work of material and data collection" about the activity of Eichmann and his German and Hungarian colleagues in Hungary; and, on the other hand, a set of foreign policy measures, such as demanding Eichmann's extradition, aides-memoire attempting official Hungarian (and socialist) judicial representation in the lawsuit in various ways, publication of documentary material, and aides-memoire to Argentina demanding the extradition of Hungarian fascist émigrés.³⁵

Esztergályos's ideas reached the party's central decision-making body

32 On the eventually failed attempt to create a communist bloc-level strategy in the Eichmann affair, see Zombory, "Status Competition."

33 N.d. n.t., Esztergályos's hand-written personal notes (hereafter EPN), located at MNL OL XIX-J-1-k Vegyes, 1945-64, 152. doboz.

34 Esztergályos based his "blackmailing theory" on the first wave of press reports, especially on an article in *Der Spiegel* on June 15. See EPN.

35 "Feladataink," EPN. Esztergályos arranged for the press department to provide regular reports about the affair in the foreign press on a weekly basis. See "Amit végeztünk," EPN.

on June 28.³⁶ The Politburo approved the policy-related principle of strengthening the anti-fascist front targeting the FRG, with Israeli Zionism as an additional ideological target, and assigned the task of data gathering and publication to the foreign ministry, among others. Also, the party leadership charged the foreign ministry with approaching Czechoslovakia and Poland for consultation. However, the Politburo crushed the carefully ordered foreign policy steps, dealing only with the accused's extradition to Hungary following the trial in Jerusalem, the official demand for a public trial, and the observer status of the main Hungarian prosecution as possible measures. The meeting did not touch upon the issue of the jurisdiction of the Israeli court with regard to Hungary's role in the investigation, the prosecution, and the hearing.³⁷

The first memorandum at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Eichmann affair, not yet written but supervised by Esztergályos, was issued on June 6, 1960. The first set of measures dealing with historical documentation listed the following potential sources of data (in order): the Ministry of the Interior, Jenő Lévai, the Jewish denomination, and the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) legation in Budapest. The memorandum supported the idea of involving "journalist Lévai" in the data gathering, due to the fact that he "has great knowledge in this area."

In all probability, Esztergályos met Jenő Lévai for the first time three days later, when the 68-year-old expert was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Lévai proved to be persuasive in presenting his knowledge, experience, connections, and capacities. Esztergályos in his report characterized him as a "living lexicon," having "an extremely broad knowledge in this field" as an expert currently working on a four-volume book to be published by Yad Vashem. What is more, Lévai was assertive, as he not only gave assurances that he would be willing to work for the foreign ministry if he received the necessary assistance, but also signaled that there were "countless other unexploited areas beside the Eichmann affair," such as proof of the Nazi past of state secretary Hans Globke, for which he had sufficient basic material. Lévai did not forget to mention that his work was greatly hampered by his not having obtained a passport since his trip to Switzerland in 1957. Esztergályos concluded in his report that "the Foreign Ministry could make excellent use

36 "Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP PB 1960. június 28-án tartott üléséről," MNL OL M-KS 288 f. 5/189. ó. e. Partially available in András Kovács (ed.), *Communism's Jewish Question: Jewish Issues in Communist Archives* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017), pp. 84–6.

37 Note: "A PB-határozat szerint átdolgozott Eichmann-anyag," MNL OL M-KS 288 f. 5/189. ó. e.; see also Kovács, *Communism's Jewish Question*, pp. 87–8.

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of Lévai quite apart from the Eichmann affair," and recommended that they should clarify with the interior ministry what concerns had been raised regarding his person, so that a decision could be made about collaborating with him. If there were no obstacle to this, he wrote, "we should, using the financial resources of the press department, make Lévai independent, put him to work under the direction of comrade Várkonyi [head of the press department], and get him to process the material available, and on the basis of pre-determined topics agreed with him."³⁸

With the approval of the deputy foreign minister, Esztergályos made a deal with Lévai on June 11 at their next meeting in the Ministry.³⁹ They decided to divide Lévai's work into two volumes. The first would cover the Eichmann affair in 20–25 sheets,⁴⁰ more than one half of which would deal with Eichmann's activity in Hungary. This volume would be followed by another one of the same length that "would aim to expose Eichmann's accomplices, with special attention given to those persons currently in office, such as for instance Globke, Adenauer's state secretary." According to the deal, Lévai would receive authorial recognition and would sign a contract with the publishing house Corvina, which was in charge of foreign language publications. Esztergályos urged his superiors to approve Lévai's contract, and specified the roles: Lévai would handle the "technical matters" and the press department of the foreign ministry would provide him with an advance payment via Corvina. At the same time, Esztergályos approached Béla Bojta, president of the National Committee of Lawyers and former head of the second-instance authority of the people's tribunals, and asked about his willingness to vet the future "finished raw material discussing the activity of the named in Hungary and his collaboration with the Hungarian fascists" in order to avoid factual errors.

The framework for collaboration having been set, Lévai started working. He not yet signed the contract with the publishing house when he submitted a note to Esztergályos in which he explained why an eight- to ten-day trip to Berlin was necessary for the completion of the book.⁴¹ He argued that some documents such as Reich plenipotentiary Edmund Veessenmayer's reports from Hungary, and files of the Wilhelmstrasse trial (Ministries Trial, eleventh of the Nuremberg Military Tribunals) were not in his possession in the

38 Note: "Beszélgetés Lévai Jenő újságíróval," June 9, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j NSZK 1950-64, 250. tétel, 004579/1, 8. d.

39 Note: "Eichmann-ügy kapcsán folytatott megbeszélések," June 11, 1960, MNO OL XIX-J-1-j NSZK 1950-1964, 250. tétel, 004579/2, 8. d.

40 Hungarian measure in press and publishing; one sheet (*lv*) amounts to approximately 40,000 characters.

41 Lévai to Esztergályos, June 15, 1960. MNL OL XIX-J-1-k Vegyes, 1945-64, 152. doboz.

original German. Also, he intended to access new documents at the archives of the Deutsches Institut Zeitgeschichte in Berlin, with whose director "I am in permanent correspondence" and who had already offered his help, and of the Deutscher Demokratischer Rundfunk and the *Berliner Zeitung*. He would also get, continued Lévai, essential books not available in German in Hungary, such as the 42-volume "Blue Series" of the IMT proceedings. Finally, Lévai expressed his intention to meet Andreas Biss, a witness in the Kasztner affair, "who lives in Berlin and is a good friend of mine" and was willing to hand over material.

Esztergályos passed Lévai's requests on to his superiors as reasonable. The autonomous relationship between the commissioner and the author is reflected in Esztergályos's remark that "[o]f course, the cost of the trip must be borne by Lévai," who "certainly has enough currency, which he receives from his clients as a correspondent for the said GDR newspaper and radio." As a moral aspect of their cooperation, Esztergályos suggested considering whether it was right to let Lévai go alone. "I stress that I am thinking here of Lévai's personal safety," he added, since Lévai was well known in the West, so it would be right to take care of his personal safety. Either someone should accompany Lévai, continued the deputy head of the political department, or the Hungarian embassy should take charge of his security. Esztergályos also pointed out the potential benefits of such a cooperative arrangement. He proposed to link the matter of Lévai's personal safety with letting "someone get acquainted with these mentioned sources of material and persons that are currently Lévai's monopoly and that could later be utilized independently of him."⁴² An important point is that Lévai was not allowed to take any documents with him to Hungary. As proof of the significance attributed to Lévai's work, after signing the contract with Corvina, the highest possible advance payment was immediately (and out of turn) transferred to him "according to the wish of the comrades."⁴³

On June 9, the very same day that Lévai was first summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ephraim Hofstädter, deputy head of Bureau 06 of the Israeli political police, wrote his letter of request to "one of the authorities on the subject of Nazi crimes." Hofstädter asked Lévai for information about "the nature, contents and origin of the various documents" in Lévai's possession that had not yet been published. Lévai submitted a copy of this letter to Esztergályos on July 8, in order to ask about the position of the Ministry before

42 Note: "Lévai Jenő kérelme," June 16, 1960, XIX-J-1-j NSZK 1950-64, 250. tétel, 004578/3, (8. d.).

43 Editor-in-Chief Dr Veres Gáborné to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 16, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j Vegyes 1945-64, 006834/1960, (339. d.).

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he replied.⁴⁴ Lévai apparently strove to avoid losing either of his precious contacts. On the one hand, he behaved openly towards Esztergályos when he forwarded him the Israeli request, waited a long time to learn the Ministry's approach to the matter, and also submitted, "according to [Esztergályos's] instructions by telephone," the reply that he sent to Israel on July 31.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Lévai let Hofstädter know via the Israeli legation in Budapest that he had already begun collecting documents related to Eichmann's case. In his reply he wrote of 300 such documents in his possession, making it clear that he had informed the Hungarian authorities about the Israeli request and that he was open to cooperation "if certain formalities are met." By this, Lévai meant that he could cooperate with the prosecution only if requested to do so officially, so he asked Hofstädter to submit a request for Hungarian authorization for him (Lévai) to one of the respective embassies. Lévai also asked Hofstädter to indicate that he had consented to collaborate by making it a condition that the request should be official.⁴⁶ When submitting the letter of request to his superiors, Esztergályos noted that "Lévai is aware that in this question all individuation may be awkward for him personally."⁴⁷

Lévai's expectations about receiving authorization to cooperate officially with the Israeli criminal investigation were not completely unfounded. When, on July 21—by way of its legation in Budapest—Israel officially approached the Hungarian foreign office demanding the Hungarian authorities' participation in the investigation,⁴⁸ the decision about Israel's legal authority was still pending. Hungary was about to send her consultation questions about a common socialist strategy to the "friendly countries," the second point of which dealt with precisely this issue. On this point, Hungary suggested recognizing the partial authority of the Israeli court as far as it concerned former victims of Eichmann's crimes now living as citizens in Israel.⁴⁹ Because the foreign ministry's answer in early August was dilatory, Israel approached Hungary again on October 12, now attaching Hofstädter's official request via its legation. The police commander provided a detailed list of the required documents on the basis of "historian" Lévai's *Black Book*, among other things. Faithful to Lévai's demands, he provided information not only about his June 9 letter of request and Lévai's reply to it, but also about the fact that "Mr. Lévai

44 Lévai to Esztergályos, July 8, 1960, MLN OL XIX-J-1-k-30/c-szn-1960, 152. d.

45 Lévai's note to Esztergályos, August 5, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-Vegyes-30/c-szn-1960, 152. d.

46 Lévai to Hofstädter, July 31, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-Vegyes-30/c-szn-1960, 152. d.

47 Note "Az izraeli rendőrség megkeresése," July 11, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-NSZK-30/c-004579-5/1960 (8.d.).

48 Official Request of the Legation of Israel, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-Izrael-30/c-005022/1960 (11.d.).

49 "Konzultációs kérdések az Eichmann-ügygel kapcsolatban," July 19, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j NSZK 1950-64., 250. tétel, (8. d.). See also in Kovács, *Communism's Jewish Question*, pp. 92–4.

emphasized, that in order to obtain these [300] documents, we would have to approach officially the Hungarian Authorities concerned."⁵⁰

To the annoyance of Esztergályos, the decision about a definitive and clear-cut relationship with Israel never arrived. The replies of the "friendly countries" to the consultation questions were disillusioning, as none showed any willingness for a joint meeting. Referring to the Soviet answer on September 10, Esztergályos reformulated some key principles of the Eichmann strategy. In his personal notes, however, he was critical of the Soviet opinion with regard to refuting the idea of Eichmann's extradition, because the former did not see the political potential in the Israeli refusal. Further, he also disapproved that the Soviet answer avoided the important issue of the Israeli court's jurisdiction. The Czechoslovak idea, not objected to by the Soviet response, of handing over documentary material to Israel unofficially by way of a "social organization" and simultaneously publishing it in order to prevent the prosecution from abusing it, was, in Esztergályos's eyes, to acknowledge Israel's legal authority. In this crucial aspect of his strategic vision, he required further consultation with the Czechoslovak partner on what sorts of documents they intended to provide, and via which means. Furthermore, noted Esztergályos, the question of the Israeli request to conduct an investigation in Hungary and to summon witnesses to the Jerusalem trial was still open. "In my opinion," he recorded, "we cannot allow this, it is our own business, and if they have a special request, they should let us know." Here he also required further consultation "with our friends." The basic principle to follow in the Eichmann affair remained the same: to "force the Israeli authorities to take decisive action against neo-fascist phenomena on the basis of the materials we have provided" by publishing those documents which they had omitted from the proceedings.⁵¹

Esztergályos summarized the experience of the intra-bloc consultation in his note of September 22, on the basis of which the Politburo, according to his decision of October 11, overruled its resolution of June 28.⁵² The idea of Eichmann's extradition to Hungary was dropped, so the only way to influence the scope of the hearing remained the semi-official channel of a "social organization," with publication as a control mechanism. The Committee of the Persecutees of Nazism was chosen to supply the Jerusalem prosecution

50 Hofstädter to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, September 19, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-Izrael-30/c-005022/6-1960 (11.d.)

51 N. d., EPN, *ibid.*

52 "Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság 1960. okt. 11-én tartott üléséről," MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 5/204. ő. e., see also Kovács, *Communism's Jewish Question*, pp. 102–5.

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with documentary evidence from Hungary. The Israeli legation was officially informed accordingly.⁵³ The material sent in this way originated from the interior ministry, which oversaw the compilation of four volumes of documentation on Eichmann and his accomplices in Hungary.⁵⁴

Lévai, the other pillar of Hungarian documentation efforts in the Eichmann affair, followed a different path. He enjoyed quasi independence from the control of the party and worked according to his authorial intentions. Though it remains unknown whether he eventually traveled to Berlin in June 1960, it is certain that he worked intensively with the support of the foreign ministry—and very rapidly, as he informed Esztergályos as early as July 8 that he would deliver three days later the “material of the book,” except for the afterword and the appendix. He also notified him that the manuscript was much longer than expected because of the huge amount of documentation.⁵⁵ György Berényi, editor-in-chief at Corvina, submitted “the compiled material of Jenő Lévai’s documentation volume” to Esztergályos on August 19.

The book

According to the list of contents enclosed with the agreement made on June 11, 1960, the work entitled *Indictment against SS Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann* was written to discuss Eichmann’s activity from 1938 until the postwar years in nine chapters.⁵⁶ The initial plan underwent some significant modifications a few days later when Lévai signed the contract with Corvina. According to Lévai’s *pro domo* attached to the Outline of Contents submitted to the publishing house, the book would not deal with Eichmann’s accomplices, as had been discussed with Esztergályos. “This part, as I have been told, would be omitted from this book now, and after a minor study trip to Berlin, would be put into a second volume.”⁵⁷ With some restructuring, this list of contents contained seven chapters and an appendix. While working, Lévai made some additional important changes.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the introduction did not deal, as originally planned, with the ideological, economic, and legal roots of the “struggle against the Jews” and the systematic road to racial extermination,

53 “Eichmann-ügyben adandó válasz Yaron izraeli követnek,” October 19, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-NSZK-30/c-006348/1960.

54 ÁBTL A-643 and A-643/3-5. See also “Tartalomjegyzék Adolf Eichmann és társai bűncselekményeit dokumentáló anyagokhoz,” at A-643/1.

55 Lévai to Esztergályos, July 8, 1960, MNL OL XIX-J-1-k-Vegyes-30/c-szn-1960, 152. d.

56 “Eichmann-ügy kapcsán folytatott megbeszélések,” *ibid.*

57 “Tartalmi vázlat, Eichmann dokumentum-kötet,” MNL OL XIX-J-1-j Vegyes 1945-64, 006834/1960, (339. d.)

58 See the preface, the introduction and chapters I–II at MNL OL, XXXII-10, 13. tétel; and chapters III–V at MNL OL, XIX-J-1-j-30/c 1945-1964 Izrael (12. d., 13. d.).

but presented two extracts from the IMT and the Wilhelmstrasse criminal verdicts, both dealing with the anti-Jewish persecutions. In accordance with the working title, this change further emphasized that the work was not a biography of Eichmann, or a journalistic “story” about him,⁵⁹ but an account located somewhere between a historical document and a criminal law piece. As Lévai wrote in the author’s preface, he had been working on his “large-scale masterpiece” of multiple volumes under preparation “for the famous Yad Vashem” when he received an official transcript from Haifa in which the investigating authority requested information. “The case of urgency was not controversial: I pulled out everything that relates to Eichmann from the material of my work” (p. 2). Lévai even attached a copy of Hofstädter’s letter to the preface. He also highlighted the historiographical relevance of his work when pointing to the significance of the Eichmann affair’s Hungarian connection (the accused’s direct and longest period of involvement in the deportations, associated with the highest number of victims). Moreover, the Hungarian material was the least known, he added, because so far only his *Black Book* had been available, which, however, did not contain the results of his research of the past ten years. Lévai thus positioned his Hungarian-focused work (and its author) in the international historiographical context of the criminal case in Jerusalem.

The first chapter (untitled) deals with Eichmann’s activity up to the Wannsee conference in 1942, his emigration policy in Vienna and Prague, and then, following the outbreak of war, forced relocation efforts. The second chapter (untitled) focuses on the deportations from all over Europe that Eichmann organized from Berlin (that is, until spring 1944). The third and longest chapter is about Hungary. “Eichmann at the head of his entire quarter-deck directs his *Sondereinsatzkommando* in Budapest. Here he intends to personally complete his ‘great work,’” summarizes the Outline of Contents. The historical account ends in this chapter with the Soviet liberation of the Pest ghetto. The following chapters are appendix-like. The fourth, entitled “The tragic fate of those deported by Eichmann,” is a compilation about the concentration and extermination camps—mainly about Auschwitz-Birkenau, where, as indicated by the author, the majority of the victims from Hungary perished. This part ends with two shorter sub-chapters, on the massacre of forced laborers deported by Eichmann, and on the tragic fate of the victims of the death marches to Hegyeshalom and the forced labor (ditch digging) that took place there. The fifth and final chapter contains documents of

59 See e.g. Quentin Reynolds, *Minister of Death: The Adolf Eichmann Story* (London: Cassell, 1961).

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various sorts concerning Eichmann's responsibility besides the deportations: extermination by gassing, forced sterilization, propaganda about blood libel, looting and other economic "businesses," and, finally, the "authentic history of the Brand-Kasztner affair."

Lévai's account differs from typical contemporary publications as it portrayed Eichmann neither as a demonic evil nor as a cog in the bureaucratic machine of the totalitarian Nazi empire.⁶⁰ What is more, it did not consider Nazi extermination policy as once and for all decided and given shape by Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. Lévai carefully considered the contextual features that influenced the forms of anti-Jewish persecution that constituted the major turning points in his account: the war, the attack of the Soviet Union, Wannsee, and Budapest. The "Endlösung" appears as the endpoint in a chain of preparatory phases in Nazi policy. In the Outline of Contents, the introduction put it as follows: "the Jewry's exclusion from the ranks of the German people, the looting of their wealth, forcing them to emigrate, to resettle, then racial extermination planned according to the Wannsee protocol."⁶¹

Though the manuscript deals with Eichmann's activity in its entirety, its primary focus is on Hungary, as agreed with the commissioners. Not only because, for understandable reasons, Lévai's archive was richest about this period, but also because the history of the deportations from Hungary clearly reflected Eichmann's direct and personal responsibility. Another aspect of the author's Hungarian focus refers to the responsibility of the local authorities. Lévai's detailed account leaves no doubt that the Hungarian quisling government and the civil service, especially the gendarmerie, was extremely active, with the latter even taking the initiative in adopting anti-Jewish measures. "It can be stated that nowhere in Europe where Eichmann worked with his *Sondereinsatzkommando* was there as much mass of horrors as in the Hungarian countryside" (p. 155). Lévai gives several reasons for this (pp. 155–6). First, "in no other state did Eichmann receive any help from the forces of power as much as in Hungary"; second, in no other country could a state secretary who disposed of local law enforcement operate as freely and with as much control over the police as László Endre and László Baky did at the interior ministry; third, the terror apparatus thwarted all attempts at resistance and movements of Christian sympathy; and finally, fourth, "Eichmann dictated an incredibly fast pace" because of the deterioration of

60 David Cesarani, "Introduction," *Journal of Israeli History* 23, no. 1(2004): 1–17, Special issue "After Eichmann: Collective Memory and the Holocaust since 1961."

61 Table of Contents, *Journal of Israeli History* 23, no. 1 (2004), Special issue "After Eichmann: Collective Memory and the Holocaust since 1961."

the war situation, Hitler and Himmler's workforce demands, "and last but not least, the pursuit of unbridled lust for glory."

The manuscript is characterized by a certain tension between the structural analysis of Nazi persecution and the emphasis put on Eichmann's personal role. Using the terms of subsequent Holocaust historiography, Lévai's approach was at the same time both intentionalist and functionalist.⁶² Structural aspects do matter in his argument, yet in a sharply different way than in contemporary Marxist historiography. When discussing the pre-1944 German pressure on the Hungarian government, Lévai contends that "[t]he description of the settlement of military and economic claims [by Germany] is outside the scope of our present work. In the following, we will describe only the steps that affect the fate of the Jewry" (p. 45). Thus, while he acknowledged that the Nazi plans relating to Hungary included military and economic aspects, he deliberately chose to deal only with the consequences that befell those qualified as Jews. Lévai placed emphasis on economic matters—for instance, when discussing the role of German industries in the extermination policy (Krupp, I. G. Farbenindustrie, etc.)—and explains the rapidity of the deportations from Hungary as being due to the German imperial demand for a cheap workforce (pp. 88–112). Although he applies the term "fascism," and takes historical-contextual reasons into consideration when studying the fate of Jews in Hungary, his "Hungarian Jewish perspective" distinguishes his work from the contemporary Marxist historiography of fascism, taking the economic, social, and military aspects of the Nazi Reich's colonial intentions as starting points.⁶³

By 1960, Lévai had accessed a considerably wider range of archival material. Although in his two *Zsidósors* books⁶⁴ he relied on a great variety of historical sources, these were primarily related to events in Hungary, and mostly also originated from Hungary. In 1948 the official Soviet report on Auschwitz-Birkenau and the testimony of Auschwitz prisoner A 70.231, together with the DEGOB⁶⁵ records on the camps other than Auschwitz, were already in his

62 See e.g. Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

63 See historian György Ránki's summary of Eichmann's activity in Hungary, given at the Hungarian kick-off press conference in the Eichmann affair, March 25, 1961, MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-Izrael-30/c-sz.n. "Eichmann-per" (13.d). This summary by the head of department of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was later delivered to the foreign press conferences of 13 Hungarian embassies abroad, MNL OL M-KS 288.f. 32.cs./1961/12. 6.e. 1-5. o.

64 Lévai, *Zsidósors Magyarországon*; Lévai, *Zsidósors Európában*.

65 Rita Horváth, "A Jewish Historical Commission in Budapest: The Place of the National Relief Committee for Deportees in Hungary [DEGOB] among the Other Large-Scale Historical-Memorial Projects of She'erit Hapletah after the Holocaust (1945–1948)," in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman, Yad Vashem, Berghahn Books (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Publications, 2008).

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possession. Lévai's historiographical approach remained "integrationist" *avant la lettre*, as in his work on Eichmann he continued to integrate the voices of victims into his account by way of the archive of the Budapest Jewish Council, the DEGOB protocols, and personal interviews. One clear difference from his earlier work is that by 1960 Lévai had acquired extensive knowledge from newly accessed archival files. His Eichmann manuscript primarily relies on the files of the Wilhelmstrasse trial, and on those of the proceedings against the major war criminals (the "Blue Series"). He studied these thoroughly in Switzerland in the 1950s, together with the scholarly literature and the press. He also obtained other important sources of information, such as the testimony of Eichmann's subordinate Dieter Wisliceny, which he referred to extensively in the first chapter, and that of Auschwitz camp commandant Rudolf Höss in Nuremberg and in Cracow. In the "List of sources consulted," Lévai expresses his gratitude to the Wiener Library and to Yad Vashem for providing him with documents and publications.⁶⁶

Due to its Cold War context, Lévai's manuscript underwent important changes during the editing and publishing process, and not because of the unknown Hungarian proofreader. Apparently, the strategic value attributed to Lévai's work increased at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs following the failure to form a common strategy at the level of the communist bloc. Esztergályos counted on the help of the East German authorities from the very start, so he prepared them in advance for possible Hungarian demands for the identification of perpetrators in Hungary.⁶⁷ As part of his efforts to reformulate the Hungarian strategy as a reaction to the Soviet response to the consultation questions in early September, Esztergályos suggested that "the German translation of Lévai's material be urgently submitted to the GDR with a demand for proofreading of material or nominal inaccuracies." Unlike Lévai, Esztergályos did not consider the submitted material as an author's book manuscript. He noted that "[b]y the way, this [Lévai's work] could form part of the materials to be handed over [to Israel] on our part, which we would bring out later in the form of a brochure." Yet he quickly added that: "[h]ere we definitely have to start from the assumption, knowing the good relationship between Lévai and the Israeli embassy in Budapest, that the material is largely in their possession."⁶⁸ This remark of Esztergályos's was undoubtedly due to a certain

66 Lévai, *Eichmann in Hungary*, pp. 290–1. Lévai approached the Wiener Library in November 1960 for the German original of several Nuremberg documents, primarily Veessenmayer's reports and letters from Hungary. The Wiener Library, 3000/9/1/887.

67 "Eichmann-ügy kapcsán folytatott megbeszélések".

68 N. d. EPN.

degree of suspicion. Yet equally important is how evidently he acknowledged Lévai's independence even in relation to Israel.

By September 22, Lévai's work had been sent to East Berlin.⁶⁹ The fact that the material for *Eichmann in Hungary* was compiled by the East German Foreign Office, and then checked by the members of the Committee of German Unity (ADE),⁷⁰ had a far more significant impact on the book than did the correction of factual errors.⁷¹ One important change was that the scope of the book was narrowed to Eichmann's role in the 1944 Hungarian operation, thereby squeezing the content of the first two chapters of the manuscript into one short introductory chapter entitled "Preliminary events." A second change was that the book placed more emphasis on the supposedly compromising Nazi-Zionist negotiations during the war. While for Lévai the "authentic history of the Brand-Kasztner affair" was of marginal significance as an aspect of Eichmann's "economic" activity of looting Jewish property, assets, and wealth, the publication places the story center stage. It became an independent chapter entitled "Eichmann's trade in human lives" in the main text. Other parts of the manuscript's Chapter V were moved to Appendix I. A selection of the manuscript's Chapter IV was also put into Appendix I. Interestingly, the IMT/MMT and the Soviet sources on Auschwitz were removed, together with Höss's testimonies. Wisliceny's writing from Bratislava, labeled "Eichmann's detailed biography," is placed in Appendix II, under the title of "Eichmann the man and the SS Officer." Besides this, Appendix II contains a statistical table on the casualties of Hungarian Jewry, taken from Lévai's 1946 *Fekete Könyv* and republished in the *Black Book*, as well as a chronological table. Certainly, Hofstädter's letter of request was excluded, together with the reference to the "masterpiece" to be published by Yad Vashem.

The editors in East Berlin inserted many additional German documents into the manuscript, and left out minor parts in order to shape the emphasis of the argument. For example, by not including the document that proved the initiating role of the Hungarian Ministry of Interior in the registration of the Jews, the book softens Hungarian responsibility, as does the added subchapter title, "Hungary to follow the German pattern." Lévai's comparison, according to which deportations from the Hungarian countryside were the most horrific of all, was also cut out, thus putting more moral weight on

69 Esztergályos's hand-written notes of a meeting on September 22, 1960, MNL OL MNL OL XIX-J-1-k Vegyes, 1945-64, 152. doboz.

70 Ausschuss für Deutsche Einheit, the body charged with the ideological campaigns against the FRG. See Heike Amos, *Die Westpolitik der SED 1948/49-1961* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1999), pp. 258-67.

71 Helmer (GDR Foreign Ministry) to Vesper (ambassador in Budapest), January 17, 1961. Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PA AA, MfAA A13.740.

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Germany as the occupier. A telling example of how additional documents altered the argument pertains to the presentation of the Kasztner affair. Lévai emphasized the continually contested nature of the Nazi–Zionist talks, and laments over the “big question”: would it have been possible to save the Hungarian Jewry through greater financial sacrifice? Leaving the question open, however, he finishes the story in Chapter V (and actually the whole manuscript itself) on a positive note, quoting a report of the World Jewish Congress (WJC). The report points out that “the economic warfare argument and Jewish hyper-patriotism spoiled many an opportunity of utilizing the eagerness of Gestapo leaders to derive certain advantages” (p. 125), and adds that least 1,673 Jews were rescued from Bergen-Belsen (an allusion to the so-called Kasztner train). The WJC report was removed and replaced by two documents from the Nazi German foreign ministry, “which prove that this transport left Hungary after secret conferences of the highest Nazi circles.”⁷² According to the implied shameful calculus, the more the Nazis were implicated, the more the whole initiative—and thus Israel and West Germany—could be compromised. Another technique used to adjust the emphasis was the translation. The Hungarian “*gyűjtőtábor*” was translated as “concentration camp,” while the *Black Book* had used the term “assembly center” (and in some cases “*internáló tábor*” [internment camp] was also translated as “concentration camp”).⁷³

The anti-Globke character of Lévai’s manuscript was greatly accentuated by additional accusations. While Lévai mentions the state secretary only a few times and charges him only with authorship of the Nuremberg laws and of the “J” passport initiative,⁷⁴ the book’s thesis became, according to the strategy of the GDR’s anti-Globke campaign,⁷⁵ that Globke was Eichmann’s direct collaborator and was thus responsible for committing genocide.⁷⁶ “If we take one by one the steps taken by Eichmann in different states, Globke’s figure will be discernible and so will the important participation of his helpers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”⁷⁷

72 Lévai, *Eichmann in Hungary*, pp. 200–1.

73 See Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 77–8.

74 In the framework of German–Swiss negotiations about the refugee question in 1938, it was Globke who suggested affixing the letter “J” to the passports of Jewish citizens of the Third Reich to prevent them from escaping to Switzerland. This information became widely known due to Lévai’s research in 1957 in Switzerland, and, as the title of an East German anti-Globke film, *Aktion J*, testifies, became the symbolic charge against Adenauer’s chief of staff.

75 Michael Lemke, “Kampagnen gegen Bonn: Die Systemkrise der DDR und die West-Propaganda der SED 1960–1963,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 41, no. 2 (1993): 153–74.

76 See especially Lévai, *Eichmann in Hungary*.

77 Lévai, *Eichmann in Hungary*, p. 31.

The reception

Lévai did not remain inactive following the submission of the manuscript. He took part in the international efforts to compromise Globke in the Eichmann case.⁷⁸ He met regularly with Esztergályos, and they seem to have developed a routine of exchanges with more or less stable roles: for valuable information, the foreign ministry functionary intervened on his behalf. On February 8, 1961, Esztergályos received Lévai, who had provided relevant information (e.g. Joel Brand as witness for the defense in Jerusalem; former SS-officer Kurt Becher trading with the Hungarian People's Republic) and had asked for help (to obtain a visa for a trip to the GDR, where he had been requested to give lectures on the television). In his memorandum, Esztergályos intervened at the Ministry of the Interior because "[s]ettling the matter would be a good gesture on our part, which could provide a basis for good and closer cooperation."⁷⁹ Esztergályos's efforts paid off. On March 13, 1961, Lévai provided information about the self-assignment of Judge Benjamin Halevi, with whom he was in indirect contact, and about the relevance of the Kasztner affair (a retrial was solicited). Esztergályos, who began to see the ideological potential in the Kasztner affair through Lévai, repeatedly recommended that his superiors should have the journalist screened by the interior ministry and examine "whether it would be right to let Lévai out for the time of the trial"—the latter's contacts with Halevi would "provide us valuable information." He added that Yad Vashem had already invited Lévai and would cover the cost of his stay for one month. In the event, Lévai traveled to Jerusalem in June 1961 for the trial's "Hungarian's episode."

The book launch of *Eichmann in Ungarn: Dokumente* was an integral part of the Hungarian foreign policy strategy that was adopted in the Eichmann affair.⁸⁰ The event took place on April 27, 1961 at the Hungarian embassy in Berlin, in front of around 70 journalists and radio and television crews from several countries, Western ones included.⁸¹ The first three questions from the audience, pre-arranged with the ADE, were related to the activity of Globke (among others) in Hungary during the time of Nazi rule. Journalists' questions

78 See in detail Jasmin Söhner and Máté Zombory, "Accusing Hans Globke: Agency and the Iron Curtain, 1960–1963," in *That Justice Be Done: Social Impulses and Professional Contribution to the Accountability for Nazi and War Crimes, 1940s–1980s*, ed. E. Le Bourhis, I. Tcherneva and V. Voisin (forthcoming).

79 Note: "Lévai Jenő újságíró látogatása," February 9, 1961, MNL OL XIX-j-1-j-Izrael-30/c-sz.n. "Eichmann-per" (13.d).

80 See Esztergályos's "Feljegyzés az Eichmann-ügyben teendő lépésekről," February 9, 1961, MNL OL XIX-j-1-j-Izrael-30/c-sz.n. "Eichmann-per" (13.d).

81 "Követségj jelentés az *Eichmann in Ungarn* kiadvánnyal kapcsolatos sajtókonferenciáról," May 2, 1961, MNL OL XIX-j-1-j-Izrael-30/c-0081/29-1961/.

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were answered by the expert Jenő Lévai. Through his answers, Lévai not only contributed to the campaign against Globke, but publicly launched a new—though smaller scale—campaign against Karl Werkmeister, FRG ambassador to Sweden.⁸²

Paradoxically, the Cold War struggles that had enabled Lévai to publish in the first place fatally influenced the reception of the book. While the press department of the foreign ministry assessed the press conferences held at no fewer than 13 Hungarian embassies, especially the Berlin one, to be a success,⁸³ the FRG authorities confiscated the copies of *Eichmann in Ungarn*.⁸⁴ In Israel, Hungarian journalist Dezső Schön, reporting on the trial on a daily basis, received the book with astonishment: “We know Jenő Lévai’s works, from the *Fekete könyv* to his most recent article series. This is why it was hard to believe our own eyes: because what turns out from this book is that for the martyrdom of 600,000 Hungarian Jews, it was not Adolf Eichmann, the defendant of the Jerusalem trial, but a certain Dr. Hans Globke who was responsible.”⁸⁵ The fact that the book could be either praised or pushed aside as an instrument of communist propaganda seriously reduced its historiographic impact both during the formative decades of Holocaust research in the Western world and in post-communist Europe.

As a consequence, the book’s international significance cannot be compared to the impact which the *Black Book* had on historiography, judicial prosecutions, and activism. *Eichmann in Hungary* was cited in Lévai’s own publications (although not as extensively as the *Black Book*), and he did not give the slightest indication, either in public or in private, of denying authorship of the Eichmann book. He promoted it as his own intellectual work. Moreover, the book was relied upon considerably in the research undertaken by American historian Randolph L. Braham. Certainly, the personal acquaintance of the two also counted in this. During the 1960s they worked together: Lévai contributed to Braham’s scholarly publications on the Holocaust in Hungary.⁸⁶ In Braham’s major work on the subject, *Eichmann in Hungary* is the third most frequently cited of Lévai’s books.⁸⁷ However, Lévai’s Eichmann

82 Frigyes Pujá, deputy minister of foreign affairs, first demanded material on Werkmeister from the Interior Ministry on April 13, 1961. Frigyes Pujá to József Galambos, MNL OL XIX-j-1-j-Izrael-30/c-0081/14-1961 (13.d.).

83 Note: “Az Eichmann-üggyel kapcsolatban tartott követségi sajtókonferenciák,” MNL OL M-KS 288.f. 32.cs./1961/12. ó.e. 1-5. o.

84 “Nyugat-Németországban elkobozták az *Eichmann Magyarországon* című könyvet,” *Népszabadság*, June 7, 1961. On the West German government’s official assessment of confiscation, see the complaint of Alphons Kugelmeier, lawyer of Hans Globke, September 29, 1961, SAPMO, DP 3/971.

85 Dezső Schön, *A Jeruzsálemi per* (Tel Aviv: Új-Kelet, 1962), p. 273.

86 See especially the series of publications entitled *Hungarian-Jewish Studies*, edited by Randolph L. Braham.

87 Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

book tends to be forgotten, so its specific features, which are otherwise absent from the literature, did not come through. Today, Lévai's reception is determined by the presumptions of mainstream Holocaust studies,⁸⁸ so it is more the reinterpretation of his work, largely due to Braham, that influences contemporary historical thought.

88 See Ferenc Laczó, "The Foundational Dilemmas of Jenő Lévai: On the Birth of Hungarian Holocaust Historiography in the 1940s," *Holocaust Studies*, 21, no. 1–2 (2015): 93–119.