A Summer of Mass Murder

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THE MAIN CHARACTERS
OF THE STORY

Survivors, Witnesses, Rescuers, Perpetrators

Cipora Brenner, survivor of the Stanisławów ghetto. Her testimony of the “Bloody Sunday” massacre is perhaps the most complete and moving description of the fate of, and tribute to, all those murdered in the New Cemetery of Stanisławów. She also survived Auschwitz.

Elizabeth Lubell, survivor of Galicia and the 1944 Holocaust in Hungary, she was one of the last escapees from the Kolomea Ghetto, leaving her parents. Her harrowing flight and survival, and reconnecting with her future husband, could be the material for a film epic.

László Zobel, survivor from Budapest who, with his mother, was able to escape from Kolomea with the assistance of an enterprising Hungarian counterintelligence agent. He survived the Holocaust after serving in the notorious forced labor service and passing the last year of the war in a Hungarian prison. His mother died in Auschwitz.

Béla Somló, Jewish driver attached to the Royal Hungarian Army. His diary and photographs from 1941 provide an authentic testimony of the plight and fate of the deportees and the Jewish communities in Galicia.

Valentina, the flower seller of Kamenets-Podolsk. She was eight years old during the three-day massacre of 22,600 Jews, August 27–29, 1941. An eyewitness of the carnage, she gave testimony about the event.

Margit Slachta, the head of the Order of the Sisters of Social Service, politician, and member of parliament. She was instrumental in bringing the information of the excesses of the deportation and consequent murders in Galicia to the highest
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echelons of the Hungarian leadership as well as to the Hungarian and International Red Cross. For her rescue work in 1941 and 1944, she was named by the State of Israel as Righteous Among the Nations.

Countess Erzsébet Szapáry came from one of the most exclusive aristocratic families in Hungary. She joined Margit Slachta and Edith Weiss in their efforts to stop the deportation and help those who remained in Galicia, and she maintained close contacts with the Hungarian and the International Red Cross, and directly with the American Embassy in informing the world about the atrocities taking place in 1941. She was named by the State of Israel as Righteous Among the Nations.

Baroness Edith Weiss, a Jewish activist and the daughter of the richest man in Hungary, Manfred Weiss, she had access to the highest echelons of the Hungarian state bureaucracy. While the family converted, she remained Jewish and became a leader of the Jewish community in Hungary. She cooperated closely in the rescue activities with Margit Slachta and Erzsébet Szapáry.

László Bárdossy, served as the prime minister of Hungary from April 1941 to March 1942. With his full support, the Council of Ministers approved the deportation. His contact with the American ambassador Herbert C. Pell did not moderate his views toward the expulsion. He was sentenced to death by the People’s Court in Hungary and executed in 1946.

Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, the Hungarian minister of interior. He opposed the deportation in 1941, yet it took him a month to stop it, and he did not stop the periodic expulsions of escapees from Galicia until the fall of 1942.

Miklós Kozma, government commissioner of Carpathian Ruthenia and one of the initiators of the mass deportation. Among all the perpetrators, he was to only one to express remorse for his actions just before his death in the fall of 1941.

Ámon Pásztój, the head of the Külföldieket Ellenőrző Országos Központi Hatóság (National Central Alien Control Office, abbreviated KEOKH). He was responsible for the deportation and the follow-up official policies of preventing the escapees in their desperate efforts to return from Galicia. He was sentenced to death by the People’s Court in Hungary and executed in 1949.

General Henrik Werth, the chief of staff of the Royal Hungarian Army. A strong proponent of the deportation, he provided the resources of the army to collect and carry out the removal of the deportees to Galicia. He died in a Soviet prison in 1952.
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General Friedrich Jeckeln, whose name is associated with the main milestones of mass murder that took place in Eastern Europe. After Kamenets-Podolsk, he became a central character in the largest killing in the Holocaust in Babi Yar and later in the Rumbula Forest in Riga. He was sentenced to death by a Soviet court and executed in 1946 in Riga.

Captain Hans Krüger, head of the Gestapo in Stanisławów, perhaps the most “productive” mass murderer in the General Government, estimated to have killed over one hundred thousand Jews and Poles, including three thousand Hungarian deportees. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in West Germany but was freed after several years.

First Lieutenant Peter Leideritz, head of the Gestapo in Kolomea. Under his authority, more than seventy thousand Jews were murdered, including close to three thousand Hungarian, Czech, and German Jews. He was sentenced to death and executed in 1949 in Poland.

And Two Brothers

Samu and Karcsi, two unpretentious characters in this book. Samu, born April 12, 1913, and married with three daughters, was a wagon driver, close to the lowest rank on the socioeconomic ladder of contemporary Hungary. Karcsi, the older brother, was born a year earlier on January 27, 1912. A tailor by trade, he was removed from the rough and tumble world of Samu. The only testimony of their last day together came from a Hungarian soldier with the final words of Samu: “I cannot leave my brother.”