

Introduction

*Kasztner Agreed to help keep the Jews from resisting deportation – and even keep order in the collection camps – if I would close my eyes and let a few hundred or a few thousand young Jews immigrate to Palestine it was a good bargain.*¹ – Adolf Eichmann

In a 1957 interview in Argentina with Dutch Nazi journalist Willem Sassen, Adolf Eichmann shared his perspective, including that particular statement. Holocaust survivor Rudolf Vrba later wrote, “Kasztner paid to use 1,684 lives with his silence.”² However, it is crucial to critically examine whether these claims accurately reflect reality. Did Kasztner genuinely assist the Nazis in their murderous plan targeting Hungarian Jews? Would Eichmann have proceeded without his involvement? Moreover, can we depend on the reliability of Eichmann’s testimony from 1960? This book aims to delve into the events surrounding the Nazi invasion of Hungary in March 1933 to thoroughly analyze and address these critical questions and more.

The Holocaust in Hungary was a devastating event made possible through the collaboration between the new Hungarian government and the German occupiers.³ It resulted in the systematic murder of over half of Hungary’s Jewish population and serves as a reminder of the horrific consequences of prejudice, discrimination, and genocide. The persecution of Jews by both Hungarian authorities and the Nazis began even before their alliance in 1940.⁴ This alliance further marked the

1 See Jewish Virtual Library, “The ‘Blood for Goods’ Deal (April 1944),” <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-quot-blood-for-goods-quot-deal-april-1944>, and Rudolf Vrba, *I Escaped from Auschwitz* (New York: Barricade Books, 2002), pp. 419–420. One might question the credibility of Eichmann’s testimony and whether Kasztner had viable options to respond. This study addresses the issue of relying on perpetrators’ testimony, analyzing the surrounding events and reaching conclusions in Chapter 15 regarding the reliability of Eichmann’s statements in the interview and more.

2 Ibid., p. 280.

3 The book will delve deeper into their cooperation and the roles each party played, while also referencing scholarly works on the Hungarian persecution of Jews, including the contributions of scholars like Raz Segal.

4 Hungary joined the Tripartite Pact, a military alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan, on November 20, 1940. This defensive alliance eventually included Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Slovakia. Yugoslavia’s accession provoked a coup d’état in Belgrade two days later, leading to invasions by Germany, Italy, and Hungary. Hungary already had prior territorial gains, such as parts of southern Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, were secured through agreements like the First Vienna Award on November 2, 1938, resulting from the Munich Agreement’s partitioning of Czechoslovakia.

onset of events that eventually led to the Holocaust in Hungary. The Hungarian government, led by Miklos Horthy, introduced anti-Jewish laws and implemented discriminatory measures against Jews. Despite this, Hungary's Jewish population of over 800,000 was able to maintain some semblance of normalcy until Germany invaded Hungary in March 1944. The Nazi invasion of Hungary followed a period in which Hungary's alignment with Germany began to weaken due to the Third Reich's struggles in 1943–44. During this time, Prime Minister Miklos Kallay took several significant steps. In 1943, he eased censorship, enabling opposition to the war to be voiced. Then, in 1944, Kallay sought contact with the Allies with dual objectives: to extract Hungary from the war and to counter the impending Soviet occupation. However, the German foreign office attributed Kallay's actions to perceived Jewish influences, and as a result, the German army prepared to breach the Hungarian border.⁵

Following the occupation, the new Hungarian government led by Dome Sztójay, with the support of the Arrow Cross Party, collaborated closely with the SS Special Commando to deport Hungary's Jews. Within a few months, about 437,000 Hungarian Jews were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the majority of them were murdered in gas chambers. The deportation was halted on July 9, 1944, but under the leadership of Ferenc Szálasi, the persecution of Jews in Budapest continued until they were liberated. In total, an estimated 565,000 Hungarian Jews perished during the Holocaust.⁶

As historians such as Yehudah Bauer, Randolph Braham, and others have demonstrated, many Jews complied with the orders to go to the transportation during the Holocaust.⁷ While the study will further discuss the debate regarding the

5 Yehudah Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (USA: Franklin Watts, 2001), p. 343. Randolph Braham, "The Jewish Question in German-Hungarian Relations During the Kállay Era," *Jewish Social Studies* 39, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 196–198. Ruth Lichtenstein, *Witness to History*, pp. 295–296. Kallay mistakenly ignored intelligence reports warning of a German invasion.

6 Peter Hayes, *Why? Explaining the Holocaust*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017, pp. 231–232. See also <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/timeline-event/holocaust/1942-1945/deportation-of-hungarian-jews>. Both Hayes and Bauer (*A History of the Holocaust*, p. 344) state that transportation was halted on July 9th. However, according to other sources such as the Hebrew site of Yad Vashem (<https://www.yadvashem.org/he/articles/general/hungary.htm>), it was halted on July 7th.

7 Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, pp. 343–344. Randolph Braham, *The politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000, pp. 84–85. Bauer emphasizes that Hungarian Jews received information from diverse sources, including returning Hungarian soldiers, former Jewish labor brigade members, Polish Jews finding refuge, and BBC reports. However, acknowledging the facts does not necessarily equate to accepting them. Up until 1944, a sense of security prevailed among them, as they had not been subjected to the wearing of the yellow star or the severe Nazi persecutions experienced in other regions. This led them to deceive themselves with the belief that "it could not happen here". While this study acknowledges the mentioned

Jewish Agency's role in not providing information, it is also important to consider whether there were early indications or risk factors that could have predicted the genocide. Were there distal or proximal signs pointing to the imminent risk of genocide? Were there any triggered risk factors at any point? These questions, along with other relevant issues, will be addressed and analyzed in this study to provide insight into the topic.

It is worth noting that the term "genocide" only came into use after World War II, alongside the study of its risk factors and triggers. Therefore, this study will not focus on questioning why individuals during the Holocaust, whether victims or others, failed to identify these risk factors—an approach that would be anachronistic. Instead, the broader inquiry here is why warning signs are often overlooked or unrecognized in various contexts, not only by those directly involved but also by bystanders. As such, the study will explore why signs of impending danger were not recognized at that time. Building on this, the study aims to analyze whether these risk factors could have been identified and applied specifically to the Germans and Hungarians. It will delve into the factors behind Hungary's collaboration with the Nazis, their subsequent efforts to disengage through negotiations with the Allies, the German view of Hungary as an unreliable partner, and the resulting occupation and continued massacre of Hungarian Jews. This analysis will also examine attempts within the Hungarian government to shift allegiances, juxtaposed with the rise of the Arrow Cross and domestic Hungarian fascism, both of which are substantial factors that demand thorough consideration.

The annihilation of the Hungarian Jews stands out as a unique event due to its rapid occurrence during the latter stages of the war. Randolph Braham writes that the Holocaust in Hungary was, in many respects, distinct from other tragedies that befell Jewish communities in Nazi-dominated Europe.⁸ Their destruction constitutes one of the most perplexing chapters in Holocaust history—a tragedy that should never have occurred. The pressing question that emerges is why such a catastrophic event was not prevented under the given circumstances. Unraveling the reasons behind this can provide valuable insights to prevent the occurrence of such atrocities in the future. The book aims to analyze the events and complex dynamics that led to the Holocaust in Hungary, addressing these critical questions:

claim, it will approach it from a different perspective and challenge it, placing responsibility on the Jewish council.

⁸ Randolph Braham and Scott Miller, *The Nazis' Last Victims* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p. 27.

1. How did this happen?
2. What were the signs of the upcoming danger, and why were they not recognized or dealt with more effectively?
3. Were there opportunities to stop it?
4. What motivated the Nazis to pursue it specifically in Hungary at that stage?

This analysis offers fresh insights into historical events, making a significant contribution to Holocaust studies. By introducing a new analytical framework to examine risk factors and triggers for genocide, it also advances the field of genocide studies and deepens our understanding of how these elements drive the rapid escalation of violence. Engaging with Scott Straus's observation on the limited academic research in these areas, this study seeks to fill that gap by situating broader genocidal processes within the specific context of the Holocaust in Hungary.⁹ Through this approach, it provides a deeper understanding of the interplay between triggers and risk factors in the onset of mass violence.

The book consists of fifteen chapters and argues that the Holocaust in Hungary was primarily orchestrated by one man, Adolf Eichmann, influenced by four key factors: Nazi ideology, Hungarian antisemitism and collaboration, the compliance of the Jewish Council, and the passive role of influential figures like Franklin D. Roosevelt. The narrative throughout the chapters revolves around this “one and four” structure. The study delves into and analyzes each of these components, challenging the prevailing narrative and uncovering new discoveries. This richness and complexity connect all parts, highlighting the significance of each component. The first two chapters provide a background on the historical events, setting the stage for the rest of the book. Each subsequent chapter either explores one of the four factors that influenced Eichmann or focuses on Eichmann himself and his actions, elaborating on these and related aspects in detail. Chapter 12 offers the main analysis, examining how these factors influenced Eichmann, made him recognize the opportunity he had, and what triggered the genocide and how the events unfolded. Finally, Chapter 14 will summarize the conclusions drawn from the preceding chapters, and Chapter 15 will further shed light on recent developments in Holocaust studies, showing how the book integrates with new research. It will also shed valuable insights on the recent release of tapes from Eichmann's 1957 interviews. Overall, it makes a significant contribution to Holocaust history and genocide studies.

⁹ See Scott Straus, “Chapter 2: Risk Factors,” in *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention*, Washington DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016, pp. 54–73.

I recall hearing my professor, Dr. Mordechai Paldiel, a Holocaust survivor and former longtime Director of the Righteous Among the Nations Department at Yad Vashem, pose a poignant question during a class: How could the transportation of Hungarian Jews—12,000 daily between May and July 1944—proceed so smoothly? He questioned why no one attempted even a small act of sabotage, such as damaging a section of the railway tracks, which stretched for many miles. A minor disruption could have caused significant delays. Dr. Paldiel compared this situation to the periodic delays we experience on the subway in Brooklyn, where even a small malfunction can result in a two-hour delay. Yet, in Hungary, despite the miles of tracks, no major delays occurred, and no one intentionally disrupted the process.¹⁰ I believe one reason for this was the Nazis' brutal retaliation tactics. For example, after Reinhard Heydrich's assassination, entire towns were massacred as a form of retribution. It is likely that the residents near the railway lines were either too terrified to act or actively prevented others from doing so. The only alternative would have been for the Allies to bomb the tracks, but that never happened. Nevertheless, the smoothness of these transports to Auschwitz remains puzzling. Understanding this requires recognizing that something special and unusual was happening—something that involved careful and meticulous planning. By studying this further, we can gain insight into how one person identified the opportunity and orchestrated the Holocaust of Hungarian Jews, using all the necessary elements to achieve that horrific goal.

10 For relevant works by Mordechai Paldiel, see the bibliography. For an in-depth discussion of Jewish rescue efforts during the Holocaust, including events in Hungary, refer to *Saving One's Own: Jewish Rescuers during the Holocaust* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), pp. 137–182. Additional context is available in the Google Books preview: https://books.google.com/books?id=wZ0nD-wAAQBAJ&pg=PR9&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false.