

Greetings from Belsen



Design, including new Hebrew font, by István Irsai

István Irsai's picture postcards and life in the concentration camp

Ladislau Löb

Centre for German-Jewish Studies
Research Paper No. 10

ISSN 1468-4721

Cover image: *Letter of thanks from the passengers of the “Kasztner train”, presented to their rescuer in the spring of 1945; in the background the group’s itinerary from Transylvania to Bergen-Belsen, Switzerland and Palestine. Designed by István Irsai.*

GREETINGS FROM BELSEN

István Irsai's picture postcards and life in the concentration camp

Ladislau Löb



*Ladislau Löb in Switzerland,
shortly after his release from
Bergen-Belsen*

Seventy years ago, on 30 June 1944, a train of thirty-five cattle trucks left Budapest with nearly 1,700 Jews on board. My widowed father was one of them. I was another, aged eleven. We believed that we were escaping from the Holocaust to Palestine, but on 9 July, after a tortuous journey, we found ourselves in the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. In August of the same year, with World War II still raging, 318 members of the group were released. The rest were held till December before they too were freed. We were all taken to neutral Switzerland thanks to an astonishing ransom

deal between the leader of an illegal Hungarian-Jewish “Relief and Rescue Committee”, the lawyer, journalist and Zionist activist Rezső Kasztner, and SS *Obersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann, the chief organiser of the Holocaust.¹

1. Randolph Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 2 vols, 943-1018, “Nazi-Jewish Policy in 1944”, in:

After the war, in Israel, Kasztner was accused of collaboration with the Nazis. It was claimed that by keeping silent about Auschwitz he had made it possible for Eichmann to deport half a million Hungarian Jews without encountering any resistance. Kasztner's reward was alleged to have been the release of the 1,700 Jews from Bergen-Belsen, who were all supposed to be rich, prominent and his personal friends or relations. After a sensational trial Kasztner was cleared of



Rezső Kasztner, broadcasting on Israeli Radio

collaboration – albeit not of a second charge of helping Nazi war criminals escape their punishment – but some months before the verdict, in March 1957, he was assassinated by Jewish extremists. He is still a highly controversial figure, regarded by some as a hero, by others as a traitor.²

Cesarani (ed.), *Genocide and Rescue*, 77-92. Rezső Kasztner, *DerKasztner-Bericht über Eichmanns Menschenhandel in Ungarn* (Munich: Kindler, 1961), 31-96, 146-246. Ladislaus Löb, *Dealing with Satan, Rezső Kasztner's Daring Rescue Mission. A Survivor's Tale* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), 51-120, 165-193, 208-221. Alex Weissberg, *Advocate for the Dead. The Story of Joel Brand* (London: André Deutsch, 1958), 15-185.

2. For the trial and the assassination of Kasztner see Shoshana Barri (Ishoni), "The Question of Kasztner's Testimonies on Behalf of Nazi War Criminals", *The Journal of Israeli History*, 18, 2 & 3 (1997), 139-165. Leora Bilsky, "Judging Evil in the Trial of Kasztner", *Law and History Review* (Spring 2001), 19, 1, 117-160. Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 1999), passim. Ladislaus Löb: *Dealing with Satan*, 242-285. Asher Maoz, "Historical Adjudication: Courts of Law, Commissions of Inquiry, and 'Historical Truth'", *Law and History Review*, Fall 2000, 18.3, 559-606. Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million. The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Holt, 1991), 255-295. Yechiam Weitz, *The Man Who Was Murdered Twice: The Life, Trial and Death of Israel Kasztner* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 2011), passim.

It is true that what became known as the “Kasztner train” or “Kasztner group” was top-heavy with VIPs – industrialists, financiers, scientists, scholars, politicians, rabbis, artists – and the wealthiest, numbering about 150, paid dearly for their places. But at the same time they provided most of the ransom for the “ordinary” people – widows and orphans, young *chalutzim* and *chalutzot*, students, labourers, craftsmen and small traders like my own father – who had been able to join according to agreed guidelines or by simply being in the right place at the right time.

Hungary before the Holocaust had a Jewish population of some 800,000. Selecting 1,700 individuals and negotiating for their lives with thoroughly evil men confronted the Committee with excruciating moral problems. The only sure way to avoid blame would have been by doing nothing. Kasztner was temperamentally incapable of such a passive attitude. He did what he was able to do in the circumstances, hoping that our release would trigger the release of much larger masses. This hope failed to materialise, but he still saved more Jewish lives from the Holocaust than any other Jew and more than Oskar Schindler, the Gentile to whom he is often compared.

As a precious merchandise in the eyes of the Germans, we enjoyed various privileges in Bergen-Belsen. We received the orders of the camp commander through our own leaders and were not regularly harassed by the SS; we were somewhat better fed than the other groups of inmates; we were exempt from forced labour; and we had been allowed to bring books, stationery and religious objects in our luggage. Moreover, Bergen-Belsen was not an extermination camp. There were no gas chambers and no deliberate murders on an industrial scale. Originally intended to keep Jews alive to be exchanged against German nationals held in enemy countries, “Belsen” acquired its notoriety at a late stage by becoming a receptacle for evacuees from camps closer to the advancing Allies. Starvation and diseases, due to ruthless overcrowding and wilful neglect, claimed the lives of 50,000 captives in the last four months of the war. But by then we had left for

Switzerland.³

There can be no comparison between the hardships suffered by us and the horrors experienced by the victims of the death camps. I am fully aware of my good fortune in having ended up in Bergen-Belsen rather than Auschwitz, and surviving while thousands of children like myself did not live to grow up. The five months we spent in Bergen-Belsen were horrific, but our privileges, such as they were, helped to make them bearable.

One important factor was the combination of leisure and the presence of so many creative personalities. Right from the start the group had developed a makeshift cultural life, which kept us busy and to some extent boosted our morale. One outstanding contributor was István Irsai.

István Irsai was born in Budapest on 6 October 1896. In World War I he served as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army and was gravely wounded. From 1925 he lived and worked in Palestine, where he married Arany Levkovits, another Hungarian. In 1929 they returned to Hungary. During the Holocaust, in 1944, they were imprisoned as part of the “Kasztner group” for five months in Bergen-Belsen with their son aged 13 and their daughter aged 8, before they were released and taken to Switzerland. In the following year they emigrated for good to Palestine. Arany died in 1950 and in 1961 Irsai married his second

3. For life in Bergen-Belsen see Rolf Keller et al (eds), *Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen. Berichte und Dokumente* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), passim. Eberhard Kolb, *Bergen-Belsen. Vom 'Aufenthaltslager' zum 'Konzentrationslager', 1943-1945* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (2002), passim. Löb, *Dealing with Satan*, 96-164. Thomas Rahe, “Kultur im KZ. Musik, Literatur und Kunst in Bergen-Belsen”, in: Claus Füllberg-Stollberg, et al. (eds.): *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern* (Bremen: Temmen, 1994), 193-206. Thomas Rahe, “Die ‘Kasztner-Gruppe’ im Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen: soziale. Struktur, Lebensbedingungen und Verhaltensformen” (unpublished article). Alexandra-Eileen Wenk, *Zwischen Menschenhandel und 'Endlösung'. Das Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 272-337. Further material from collections of unpublished testimonies of survivors, supplied by the archives of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, Yad Vashem and the USC Shoah Foundation, supplemented by my own memories and conversations with fellow-survivors.



István Irsai, 1942

wife, Hilda Stein. In Palestine – later Israel – Irsai used the Hebrew name Pesach Ir-Shay. He died in Tel Aviv on 31 July 1968.

Irsai was an extremely versatile artist. His daughter, Miryam Ettlinger-Sommerfeld, describes him as “a musician, an architect, a set designer, a photographer, a graphic artist, a painter, a sculptor and the author of numerous articles and book manuscripts”⁴. He produced impressive, often highly original, work in all these fields, but his greatest achievement was

a large body of commercial posters, for which he developed a style of his own and new printing methods. In the 1930s in particular the posters he designed for many companies, large and small, could be seen everywhere in Hungary and beyond. They bore the marks of the dominant artistic movements of the period – Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Constructivism, Art Deco – but on all this he imposed his own vision and technique. Ádám Várkonyi, the owner of the Budapest Poster Gallery, rightly calls him “one of the greatest masters of modernist-constructivist poster art”⁵.

In Bergen-Belsen Irsai continued to work as far as conditions allowed. According to Miryam Sommerfeld, he had “virtually no drawing materials, except for a pen and a tiny box of Anilin watercolours”, but he managed to produce a remarkable set of nine “minimalist

-
4. For information about Irsai’s life, given both orally and in an unpublished sketch entitled *Biographical CV – Stefan P. Irsai (1896-1968)*, I am indebted to his daughter, Mrs Miryam Ettlinger-Sommerfeld; likewise for her permission to reproduce her father’s works. The quotation is taken from Sommerfeld, *Biographical CV*, 6.
 5. Sommerfeld, *Biographical CV*, 4.



István Irsai, in his Budapest studio

drawings of scenes portraying everyday life in the camp, expressing intense emotions with great restraint”⁶. Executed in black ink on brown wrapping paper, the drawings are among the most striking visual representations of any concentration camp. Although they were conceived as picture postcards, they were never developed as such or posted. To some of them Irsai added dates once we were in Switzerland. He also prepared coloured versions for friends, but the monochrome originals, reproduced in this paper, are more suited to the gloomy topic. The texts that accompany them are based on my own memories, the testimonies of other survivors and the research of historians.

6. Ádám Várkonyi, Introduction to Budapest Poster Gallery, http://budapestposter.com/?page_id=92.

At first sight these cards look very different from Irsai's posters. While the posters display strong primary colours, the cards show only black lines and shapes against a light background. This was primarily due to the unavailability of paints in the camp, but it seems all the more effective, given the theme of captivity and deprivation. The chief purpose of the posters was to make products look attractive in order to sell them. Clearly, Irsai was not trying to make Bergen-Belsen look attractive, but to reveal the sufferings of the inmates. Consequently, whereas the posters are "clear, airy and cheerful", as the art historian Katalin Bakos describes them,⁷ the cards are dark, oppressive and sombre. While the posters often operate with broad humour, the humour of the cards, where present, is of the ironic or black kind. The viewers of the posters had to be informed by the posters themselves what they were looking at: the viewers of the cards were assumed to have inside knowledge; therefore the cards needed less or no explanatory writing. But despite these differences the cards share many of the salient features of the posters: minimalism; stylisation; composition by montage; concentration on the telling aspect; replacement of naturalistic reproduction by a language of signs; use of plain geometrical shapes, clear lines and bold perspectives; avoidance of mere decoration. They are an integral part of an oeuvre that covered a much wider range of works than only the best-known graphics and a much longer stretch of time than the 1930s.

The apparent simplicity of the drawings, then, hides a highly sophisticated approach. Reduced to bare essentials, the selected views of the camp have great symbolic force. Each card is a distillation of complex experiences, conjuring up not only our material surroundings but also our hopes, disappointments and fears. To appreciate how much meaning Irsai is able to convey with such seemingly primitive devices one only needs to set the memories told by us former captives

7. Katalin Bakos, "Bolder than Painting. The Constructivist Influence in Hungarian Poster Art", in Katalin Bakos *et al.* *Posters in Hungary 1924-1962*, Valencia: Pentagraf Editorial 2009, 211.

side by side with his drawings. What the rest of us report in lengthy narratives Irsai makes visible through the boldly stylised portrayal of a few typical objects which look as if they had been caught purely at random, but which on further reflection prove to have been carefully chosen to awaken a multitude of resonances and associations. In the drawings from Bergen-Belsen the most frequently seen props of this kind are the huts, the watchtowers and, above all, the barbed-wire fences, which recur in each drawing as the *leitmotiv* of the whole set.



Barbed-wire fence with huts 10 and 11

The barbed-wire fence next to huts 10 and 11 is Irsai's most striking representation of the ubiquitous barbed wire. In real life barbed-wire fences along the perimeter of the camp – with electric current running through them – cut off all the captives from the outside world, and barbed-wire fences between the compounds within the camp separated the different groups of captives from each other. Any communication between the groups was strictly forbidden and although

we did manage to exchange some stealthy information, be it through whispered words or smuggled notes, the barbed wire remained almost impenetrable both literally and figuratively. Hut number 11 and part of hut number 10 were our allocated quarters.

It is common knowledge that people forced into close proximity and deprived of personal space will respond by frustration and anger. This

also happened to us. Not long after our arrival in Bergen-Belsen our confinement behind the barbed wire began to produce aggression. In the words of Szidonia Devecseri, we soon became “irritable, quarrelsome and nervous, parents with their children, friends among themselves and even strangers between them”.⁸ But the aggression was not restricted to individuals. There were conflicts between – and within – the different political, social or religious factions in the group. Communists quarrelled with capitalists, orthodox with neologues, young pioneers with old bourgeois, revisionists with moderates, Zionists with anti-Zionists, the smaller but more powerful contingent from Transylvania with the larger but less influential one from Budapest. The arguments could erupt at any moment to be followed, after grudging reconciliations, by new arguments. But whatever the arguments may have seemed to be about, their violence was largely the product of the barbed wire that held us captive.

In this drawing, thanks to Irsai’s masterly use of perspective, the enormous barbed-wire fence that fills the entire foreground as it towers over the downsized huts, with no empty space between them, appears not only as the most formidable concrete obstacle to physical freedom but also as a powerful symbol of the sufferings of captivity in general.

What those sufferings were in our special case is explained by Jenő Kolb most perceptively. Throughout our stay in Bergen-Belsen Kolb was writing a diary, which has proved to be the most informative document of our life in the camp. Observing the group’s conduct after three months behind barbed wire, Kolb noted an alarming decline, manifesting itself in friction between individuals, anti-social behaviour and worsening health:

People’s nervous state and moral condition are deteriorating more and more. Tension near breaking point, loud arguments and insults

8. Szidonia Devecseri, Unser Schicksal. *Das Tagebuch der Devecseri Szidonia* [Our Destiny. The Diary of Szidonia Devecseri] Bergen-Belsen Memorial, 6

over a bunk, the stove, the positioning of a lamp and a spoonful of jam. Everything gets stolen ... The majority are ill, wasted, hungry and nervous.⁹

A week later he coined the term “barbed-wire disease” for all the physical and emotional discomforts that Bergen-Belsen inflicted on us. As “symptoms” of the “barbed-wire disease” he named “nervous excitement, distrust, quarrels, depression, decay of moral inhibitions”; as its “causes” he listed “great weight loss, increased thyroid function, eternal hunger, insecurity, total lack of privacy, sexual disorder, etc.”¹⁰ The diagnosis was playful rather than strictly scientific, but the message was clear: the barbed wire enclosing our quarters represented everything that made our captivity in Bergen-Belsen so traumatic.

The barbed wire also provided the cruel punch line of one of the poems in a slim volume of poetry entitled *In Captivity*, which the poet Ferenc Ábrahám not only wrote but actually constructed physically, out of empty margarine boxes, tin cans and scrap wire, in the camp. Here is the poem in my own translation from Hungarian:

Between fences of barbed wire

The golden moon floated slowly,
Through clouds the colour of milk
And stars dotted like eyes over the sky,
In the warm, still summer night.

I stood beneath the gift of the sky,
My eyes stared, thirsting for beauty,
Into the cool, distant wonder of space.
And the moon continued its slow course.

9. Jenő Kolb, *Bergen-Belsen Tagebuch* [Bergen-Belsen Diary], ed. Shoshanna Hasson-Kolb, Alexander Barzel, Thomas Rahe, Bergen-Belsen Memorial (2000), 6 October 1944.

10. Kolb, *Tagebuch*, 14-15 October 1944.



Hut 11 with watchtower

I felt the wind of a tremendous release.
The temptation of freedom – a holy motion –
Infused my tired limbs with strength.
My whole body began to tremble.

I set off like a bird that has found its wings,
Lightly, hardly touching the ground.
Convinced that I could freely soar into space
With nothing to hold me back.

My flight towards freedom lasted
Just a few moments. I ran a few steps.
Then I stumbled into the barbed wire
And lay bleeding, a fool.

*1944, Bergen-Belsen*¹¹

11. Ferenc Ábrahám, *Rabságban, Ábrahám Ferenc versei és műfordításai* [In Captivity, Poems and Translations by Ferenc Ábrahám], Bergen-Belsen (1944), 16.

“It was your stereotypical camp – the long narrow barracks, the barbed wire, the separation between compounds, the mines between the wire fences so that if anybody would escape, there would be no hope or prayer that they would go anywhere”.¹² As my own memory of arriving in Bergen-Belsen is rather hazy, I have borrowed Judy Jacobs’s brief account of her first glimpse of the camp. The same stereotypes that she recalls in words appear in visual form in Irsai’s drawing.

Number 11 was one of two huts allocated to us. It was divided into eight rooms with about 180 square metres of floor space. One room doubled up as store and sick bay; another contained some perforated lead pipes which dispensed trickles of cold water to wash both ourselves and our laundry; the third served as our leaders’ quarters; of the remaining five rooms each provided living space for up to 160 people, or 1.4 square metres per person. In number 10 three rooms belonged to our group; the other five, holding Polish Jews, were separated from ours by an impenetrable concrete wall inside the hut and barbed wire outside. The dates, which Irsai added to the drawing after our liberation, refer to our arrival in Bergen-Belsen in July and our departure for Switzerland, in two contingents, in August and December 1944.

At first sight the neat lines of the drawing suggest relatively comfortable lodgings. On closer inspection the patches of peeling plaster seen through the barbed wire hint at neglect and decay. Looking at the segment of barbed wire Irsai singles out, it may not even be too far-fetched to think of crucifixion. In reality, the huts were barely fit for human habitation, as we were distressed to find the moment we entered them. We therefore tried to spend as much time as possible in the open space outside the huts, but were increasingly driven back inside as the weather deteriorated.

While outside, we were spared the discomforts of the huts, but we were forced to watch the plight of the group of captives on the other side of the barbed wire, who were even worse off than we. They were

12. Judy Jacobs, Interview 1.4.1966, Shoah Foundation.

Dutch Jews, who had to wear the yellow star and perform slave labour and who were beaten by the Germans in front of our eyes. Some weeks after our arrival tents were pitched in that compound and occupied by a contingent of ragged and emaciated women. On the night of 9 November a fierce storm destroyed the tents and the women were crammed into more solid but already overcrowded buildings. As we learnt on the grapevine, they were also Dutch and had been transferred in appalling conditions from Auschwitz. What we did not know was that one of them was called Anne Frank and that she would die shortly before the liberation of the camp a few metres from the spot where we had spent five months in fear and uncertainty before being released to Switzerland.

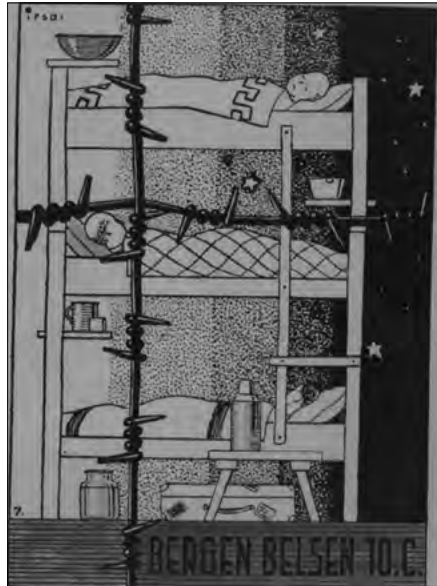
The open space outside the huts was the scene of a particularly traumatic recurrent event, the *Zählappell* or roll call. Every day, in all weathers, we had to stand there in rows five deep while the SS counted us. This could take several hours as they often miscounted, possibly because they found it hard to add up or because they wanted to wear us out. One of them was tall, bad-tempered and fond of shouting abuse. We called him “Cut Mouth” because he had a hare lip, or “Betar” after one of the most militant Zionist groups. Another was short, cross-eyed, relatively friendly and always with a pipe in his mouth. We called him “Popeye” after the cartoon character or “Mizrahi” after a religious Zionist organisation. The nicknames were our small revenge for the pain they caused us.

The roll call is remembered by all of us with revulsion. The physical ordeal was severe, as may be illustrated by George Brief’s graphic recollection:

They would line us up in the courtyard of Bergen-Belsen surrounded with these towers and the SS and the guards and you had to stand and stand and it would rain and even snow and you had to stand and stand there until the SS officers will go by and they will count the prisoners as if there was a way other than this to disappear from there. And at least in my memory these things were incredibly

long, incredibly trying and cold and threatening.¹³

But the psychological effect, which Mrs Tibor Adler, for example, recalls with two disparate but all the more telling images, was equally hurtful: “They counted us like animals. It was humiliating for people to be treated like numbers, which of course we were for them.”¹⁴ And my own memories reflect both the physical and the psychological insult as I see myself standing with aching legs in a puddle, buffeted by the merciless north wind through soaked garments, sometimes afraid and most of the time bored.



Hut 10, room C

The portrayal of three inmates sleeping peacefully in their bunks is deceptive. Conditions inside the huts were anything but agreeable. Edit Goldstein gives a vivid impression of our many discomforts:

I got a top bunk under a slanting roof. It was impossible to sit up ... There was no light and no air. When it started raining, the rain came in, straight onto my bunk. I put my food bowl where the rain came in, but then it came from somewhere else ... Eventually our things went mouldy. There was no chance of airing them because if I hung something up outside it would have immediately been

13. George Brief: Interview with Kenneth Aran, 2. 11. 1997, Shoah Foundation.

14. Tiborné Adler, Untitled manuscript, January-August 1945, Memorial Museum of Hungarian Speaking Jewry, Zefat, and Bergen-Belsen Memorial.

stolen... In front of the toilet there were long queues. People were freezing and if it wasn't one's turn in good time, there were great problems.¹⁵

At night we were strictly forbidden to leave the huts, even to go to the latrine. Therefore, rather than queuing for the single toilet at the back of each room, many of us kept some kind of container in a corner of our bunk as a chamberpot. Mine was a jam jar, which I managed to upset several times, to the fury of the old man below.

The nights were particularly grim. I will never forget the jumble of impressions that kept me awake: the bare bulbs that seemed to swallow rather than give out any light there was; the tight three-storey bunk nearly colliding with the ceiling; the bumpy palliasses with the rough blankets rumoured to be made of human hair; the fleas, bedbugs and lice that attacked me as soon as I lay down; the sniffs, coughs, burps, farts, sighs, groans and screams; the whispered arguments and sudden roars of abuse; the flushing of the toilet; the tinkling of the chamberpot substitutes; the dripping of water through the leaky roof; the howling of the wind through the cracks in the walls; the searchlight from the watchtower sweeping the small window at regular intervals; men shouting and dogs barking in the distance; and me tossing and turning in the cold, damp, smelly darkness, trying not to scratch myself and wishing that I were somewhere else.

There was no hope of peace and quiet for anyone. As Szidonia Devecseri describes it, our nerves were stretched to breaking point either by the constant noise or by the worry about friends and relations we had left behind in Hungary or somewhere worse: "In 24 out of 24 hours there is never a minute's silence. By daybreak the noise has somewhat abated, and I ache as I imagine the much greater torments of the people who have been deported elsewhere, including our own loved ones."¹⁶ With no privacy to be found anywhere, people desperately missed the

15. Edit Goldstein, Interview with Bertram von Boxberg, Bergen-Belsen Memorial, p. 12-13.

16. Szidonia Devecseri, *Unser Schicksal*, 36-37.

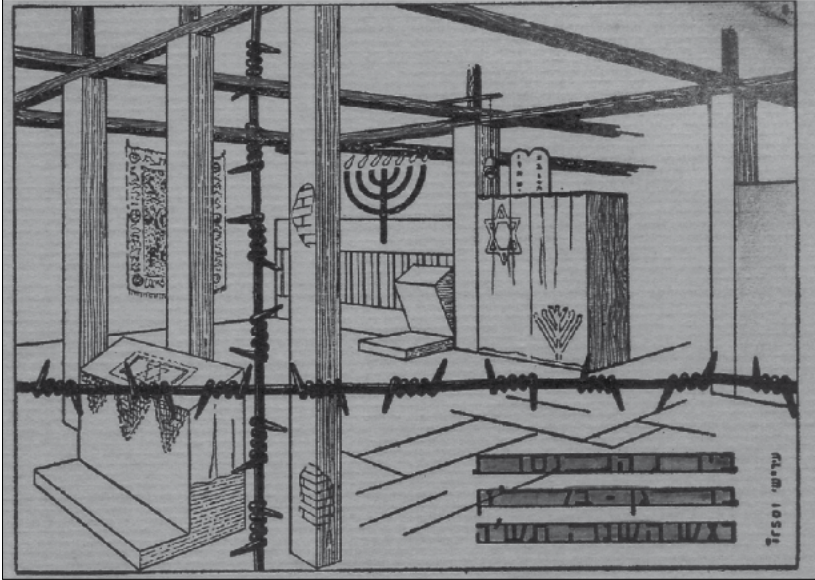
relief of giving rein to their emotions, as Blanka Gador writes: “If you wanted to cry you could only do so at night and even then you were assisted by at least fifty of the hundred and fifty sleeping and snoring inhabitants of the hut who had heard you and woken up.”¹⁷

All was not gloom, however. The huts could also accommodate light entertainments, language courses and intellectual pursuits. The entertainments included recitals of songs and texts in prose or verse by the singers, actors or writers among us. I can still hear bits of performances by the opera singers Dezső Ernster and Hanna Brand, the actress Margit Salgó, the poet Hermann Adler and the novelist Erzsí Palotai. However, what I remember best – although I did not understand all of it – was “Radio OyVay”, a spoof review modelled on the sophisticated political and literary cabarets of Central Europe and “broadcast” in the dark. Featuring mock news, satirical sketches and humorous ballads, it poked fun at the more conspicuous members of our group, the German guards, the food, the weather, the quarrels of the political parties and other everyday issues. The most popular language classes were in Hebrew as we had set out for Palestine and were dominated by Zionists; but English, French and even German lessons were also well attended. The intellectual pursuits mainly took the form of lectures and discussions by the many eminent scholars, scientists, writers and other experts on a diversity of social, political, scientific, philosophical, historical, artistic topics. Edit Goldstein lists “young, old, religious, secular, artists, singers, journalists, doctors, all kinds of interesting people who gave talks”.¹⁸ Of these I still remember the psychiatrist Leopold Szondi and the writer Béla Zsolt. To me such talks of course meant nothing, but they helped the adults to forget their plight for a while. On one occasion Irsai mounted an exhibition of his drawings, which the camp commander ordered him to dismantle.¹⁹

17. Blanka Gador, *Bergen-Belsen*, Bergen-Belsen Memorial, 7.

18. Goldstein, Interview, 14-15

19. Cf. Thomas Rahe, “Distanz und Ideal. Zeichnungen István Irsais aus dem Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen“, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland*, 11 (2009), 165.



Huts into synagogues

Although the majority of the group was not religious, many clung to the Jewish rituals, whether from belief, a sense of tradition or sheer despair. Some sought solace in daily prayer, others in studying religious texts. The devotional objects we had been allowed to bring with us – Torah rolls, Bibles, copies of the Talmud, *tallitot* (prayer shawls) and *tefillim* (phylacteries) – were in frequent use. For the great festivals – Rosh Hashana (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) – the huts were transformed into temporary synagogues for the different congregations present. The naked light bulbs were festooned with Stars of David cut out of cardboard. Eternal lanterns were made of tin cans and the burners of tea warmers. The walls were hung with home-made posters bearing sacred inscriptions. Women's sections were curtained off and the concrete floors covered by blankets masquerading as oriental rugs. One member of the group had a *shofar* – the ram's horn blown at certain points of the service – for which he demanded 300 cigarettes as a rental. Finally he accepted a tin of sardines and the shofar made the rounds of the improvised

synagogues. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, Kolb reports, one rabbi delivered a “very striking” sermon which created a general sense of good will and solidarity, while another rabbi spoilt the atmosphere by being “extremely weak and long-winded”, and a third rabbi, 82 years of age, cried throughout his address, and his whole congregation cried with him. On the second day the festivities were disrupted by a roll call lasting an hour and a half, but after a “quiet celebration with the Halutz pioneers” Kolb was able to look back on an “extremely beautiful evening”.²⁰

The weekly celebrations of the Sabbath showed up the deep divisions in the group, particularly those between the Orthodox and the Neologues or the particularists and the assimilated. While the former celebrated with prayers, the latter did so with singing and dancing till the SS ordered them to keep quiet. In the worst scenario the Neologues blamed the Orthodox for bringing about the Holocaust by their refusal to adapt to the Hungarian way of life, while the Orthodox claimed that the Holocaust was divine retribution meted out to the Neologues for abandoning their religion.

Four of the major Jewish rites of passage also took place while we were in the camp. Two newborn boys were circumcised; several other boys, reaching their thirteenth birthday, celebrated their Bar Mitzvah; one couple got engaged; and a handful of people, both young and old, died and were removed from our compound.

In keeping with the large religious cohorts, there were many rabbis, representing all persuasions from the Reformed to the ultra-Orthodox. The most distinguished and most respected, though far from generally liked, was the ultra-Hassidic rabbi of Szatmár, Joel Teitelbaum. I remember him as a distant but compelling figure, surrounded by a few dozen devoted disciples, who venerated him like a saint and shielded him from the hardships of the camp. He had a cook of his own who was allowed to prepare his meals in the camp kitchen, even though

20. Kolb, *Tagebuch*, 17-20 September 1944

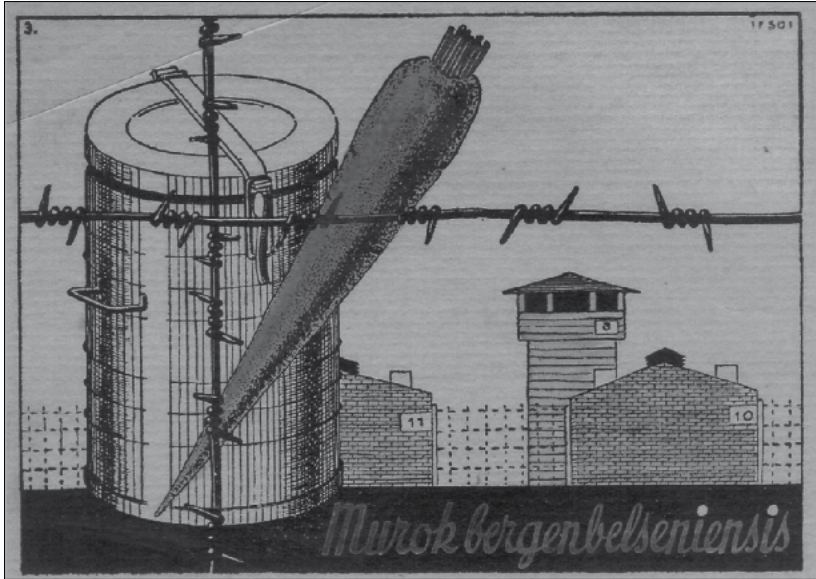
he lived mainly on bread and jacket potatoes. When all the men were required to shave off their beards in order to reduce the hiding places for lice he was allowed to keep his. He was in the habit of using the latrine during roll calls, so that we all had to wait longer for the guards to decide that none of us had escaped. His aloofness did not endear him to the majority of the group, but he had unique charisma. In the words of Yehuda Blum “he was no ordinary human being, whether you liked him or not.”²¹ Perhaps his most salient feature was the quiet confidence he derived from his faith. While the rest of us lost heart at some point or other, he lived through the five months in Bergen-Belsen with an astonishing certainty that God would save him, and he radiated this feeling to those around him. Detesting the secularity of Zionism, he never accepted that he owed his life to Kasztner’s worldly deal with Eichmann and in due course emigrated with all his adherents to the USA.

But neither culture nor religion could protect us in the long run from the sheer physical miseries of the camp. The most insistent of these was hunger. As we were constantly hungry we were constantly thinking about food. By day we never stopped talking about delicious meals we had had or were hoping to have again; by night we dreamt about them. We swapped elaborate recipes that might never materialise. We argued about food. We fought over food. We stole food from each other. It is a true reflection of our hunger and our preoccupation with food that Irsai devoted two cards, rather than one, to food.

The daily rations we were given by the Germans consisted of about 330 grammes of bread, 15 grammes of margarine, 25 grammes of jam, 1 litre of soup, 1.5 litres of coffee substitute and occasionally a small piece of cheese or sausage; children below four received additional rations and some milk.²² The provisions we had brought with us supplemented these rations to some extent, but still fell far short of

21. Yehuda Blum, Interview with Thomas Rahe, 1. 6. 1977, Bergen-Belsen Memorial, 20

22. Extracted from an anonymous typescript entitled *Die Deportation nach Bergen-Belsen*, supplied by YIVO, Center for Jewish History, New York, 11-12.



Wild carrot

what we needed. To make matters worse, as time passed, both the rations and our own reserves dwindled. And the hunger became even harder to bear whenever it struck us that our leaders were eating more and better behind closed doors than the rest of us.

The coffee, which was delivered from the camp kitchen for breakfast in the early morning and for supper in the late afternoon, was made of some unknown substitute that had very little in common with what we had known as coffee. Ben Hersch speaks for all of us by calling it “black water that was sometimes warm and sometimes not – not bad tasting, just tasteless.”²³

The main meal of the day, carried by two men in large metal containers holding 25 or 50 litres, was a soup made of unpeeled and unwashed turnip, mangold and other root vegetables that we had

23. Ben Hersch, Interview with Margaret Holding, 8 July 1977, Shoah Foundation

never seen before, except perhaps as cattle feed. We referred to all these vegetables by the Hungarian generic term “murok”, meaning wild carrot, which inspired Irsai to coin the mock Latin name “Murok bergenbelseniensis” for them. Our overwhelming simultaneous need for, and revulsion from, this soup is reflected by the huge container and carrot dwarfing the camp in the drawing. I also have a vague memory of a mock heroic poem or song somebody had written about this “murok”, but I no longer remember any of the words. On our lucky days we could find some potatoes and even some fragments of meat in the soup. True to the irrationality of the Nazi system, the containers destined for the orthodox members of the group had a large letter K painted on them. This stood for “kosher” and meant that there was no meat in them. However, sometimes the K was painted by mistake on a container that did hold some minuscule amounts of meat. The more rigorous among the orthodox went hungry rather than eating the suspicious food, while the more easy-going persuaded themselves that they had been given kosher meat.

Initially, we were unable to swallow this soup. We left it in the containers, poured it away, or tried to hand it to our less well-off neighbours across the barbed wire. But when we got hungrier we were only too glad to have it. As Edit Goldstein remarks drily: “At first nobody wanted to eat this stuff. It was for pigs, not human beings. A day or two later we were queuing up for it.”²⁴ The state to which hunger eventually reduced us can be gauged by William Stern’s recollection of watching “a previously very well-to-do and honourable gentleman ... licking out with his finger the bottom of the food containers because the amount that was rationed to each one was obviously not enough for him”.²⁵

The distribution was extremely contentious. From the start the atmosphere was poisoned by the knowledge that the bearers of the

24. Goldstein, Interview, 13.

25. William Stern, Interview with Israel Abelis, 23. 7. 1997, Shoah Foundation.

soup were not only receiving extra rations for their labour but were helping themselves to more than their fair share on the way from the kitchen to the huts. The angry anonymous author of “Deportation to Bergen-Belsen” claims that “some of the ringleaders often embezzled 30-40 litres of soup, which they divided among themselves”²⁶. Once the soup arrived, Kolb’s diary reports, there were daily scenes of “tumult, confusion, shouting and unprecedented scuffles – for a plateful of vegetables with a few scraps of meat.”²⁷ According to the law of gravity the solid ingredients of the soup remained near the bottom of the containers. As a result, everybody wanted to be served as late as possible. At the same time everybody was afraid of getting less than everybody else. The hunger made us more irritable and aggressive than we already were owing to our living conditions. There was a great deal of pushing and shoving and there were arguments which sometimes developed into full-scale brawls. Jack Gross recalls:

People were so hungry that they were fighting, ‘You gave him more! You gave me less! Why did you give him more? Why did you favour him?’ And they were grabbing things from each other’s hands and they were also stealing.²⁸

For my part, I remember the mixture of fascination and



Bread, O!

26. Anon, *Die Deportation*, 21

27. Kolb, *Tagebuch*, 18 July.1944

28. Jack Gross, Interview with David Brotsky, 9. 11. 1997, Shoah Foundation.

shock I felt when I first saw blood on the face of a distinguished lawyer after such an encounter.

The bread came in grey loaves reminiscent of bricks, both in shape and weight. Like the daily soup, we initially found it hard to swallow but were soon only too glad to get it. As Ági Hendell writes, it appeared to be “made of mud and sawdust” but after a while seemed “the best thing that you ever tasted in your life”.²⁹ To improve its taste and quality, we tried to adapt it as best we could. Emanuel Mandel explains precisely how “people became experts at taking the bread that was given and slicing it razor thin to preserve it and in fishing the potatoes out of this soup thing and making some kind of a potato salad type concoction which would go on the top of the bread ... making these into kind of open faced sandwiches which were more nutritious than it would have been just drinking the soup.”³⁰ For birthdays and festivals many women created elaborate “cakes” out of bread, margarine and jam.

Our leaders built up reserves against emergencies by withholding part of our allowance and regularly replacing the old loaves with new ones. Luckily no emergency arose and the loaves rotated till we left for Switzerland. Less happily, it was known that one or two among our leaders were selling some of the communal loaves for their own profit. The anonymous author of “Deportation to Bergen-Belsen” writes most bluntly about “a dirty trade in these bread reserves at the expense of the starving and to the advantage of the functionaries.”³¹

In fact there was a great deal of selling and buying in general. It had started with simple barter and soon developed into a complex economy that mirrored the economy of the world outside. Goods and services were exchanged for other goods and services or for IOUs to be redeemed in US dollars or Swiss francs after our hypothetical liberation. There were booms and slumps, inflation and deflation,

29. Ági Hendell, Interview with Elisabeth Pozzithanner, 5. 5. 1996, Shoah Foundation

30. Emanuel Mandel, Interview with Ester Funder, 20 June 1977, Shoah Foundation

31. Anon, “Deportation”, 18

agents and brokers. And for a common “currency” there were cigarettes.

Our rations included a small amount of cigarettes, which the non-smokers used for buying food and other goods from the smokers, who were only too willing to part with essentials in order to obey their addiction. Prices varied, but this extract from Miriam Buck’s table³² gives a good idea of the going rate for a representative sample:

4 pieces of toilet paper	1 cigarette
1 supper	1-2 cigarettes
1 lunch	3-4 cigarettes
1 onion	3 cigarettes
1 tin of tomatoes	5 cigarettes
1 portion of butter (30 gr)	8 cigarettes
1 pair of woollen socks	25 cigarettes
1 loaf of bread (25 kg)	50 cigarettes
1 pair of women’s shoes	150 cigarettes
1 pair of men’s shoes	200 cigarettes
1 men’s suit	270 cigarettes

330 grammes of bread a day may seem generous concentration-camp fare, but the nutritional value of this bread was minimal. There were heated scientific debates about whether two thick slices or three thin ones were more nourishing. Rulers were used to ensure accuracy. Some of us divided their loaves into equal parts for each day, while others, who did not have such strength of mind, finished theirs early and were left with nothing till the next one arrived. Irsai’s drawing of the diary dominating our huts, as the hunger dominated our bodies and minds, illustrates the decline of a loaf to nothing in three days, followed by starvation on the fourth, conveyed by the visual rendering of the Hungarian saying that a person in severe pain “sees the stars”. How hunger could invade even the subconscious mind is illustrated by what Kolb overheard a young pioneer telling his friends one morning:

32. Buck, 10-11

“In my dream I was in a baker’s shop. I asked for bread and – can you imagine? – they asked me how much I wanted!”³³

We were granted a brief respite from hunger shortly before our departure for Switzerland. From the Red Cross in Geneva we received a number of parcels containing food, medicines and a product called “Starkosan”, which was a chocolate powder with added vitamins and nutrients. I have never forgotten how we all stuffed ourselves with it, and to this day, when survivors meet, one or other is bound to start enthusing about it.

For me, though, the Swiss parcels could have proved disastrous. As we were getting ready to leave the camp, in an act of bravado I slipped a small bottle of vitamin pills through the barbed wire to one of the

emaciated figures in the next compound. As soon as I had done that I thought a guard in the watchtower nearby had seen me. In panic I ran back to my hut and hid under the bunks till it was clear that nobody had followed me. I will never know if the guard had seen me in reality or only in my imagination.



Children's fashion in Bergen-Belsen

As time passed, our wardrobe showed more and more signs of wear and tear. The tailors and shoemakers in the group found themselves increasingly in demand. Clothes beyond repair were cannibalised to

33. Kolb, *Tagebuch*, 3 November 1944

patch up any that could still be mended. Blankets pilfered from the bunks were transformed into winter coats. Planks, from the same source, were carved into wooden soles and attached, with leather straps or with strips cut from tin cans, to ragged shoes. Some women developed an unexpected skill in unravelling worn-out knitware and recycling the wool to make new garments. These efforts sometimes resulted in quite outlandish combinations, albeit not to the extent claimed by Irsai in this ironically named caricature.

But the caricature was more than just a joke. The decline of our wardrobe was a visual metaphor for our own gradual physical and psychological decline, and our struggle to repair it revealed our desire to keep our bodies and minds in working order. We did not always succeed. Just as the repairs to our clothes turned out to be less than perfect, we were unable to prevent our physical and mental condition becoming less stable the longer we were held in the camp. Those members of the group who gave special cause for concern were the children.

There were about 320 of us children, of all ages from birth to the end of adolescence, at risk of running wild without the support of a useful occupation. A pack of Polish orphans was particularly rough. Some had already spent years in camps, others had witnessed atrocities elsewhere. As a result they were brutalised and full of hatred for everything and everybody. But the rest of us were also on the verge of turning into delinquents. In order to establish some discipline, the adults tried to organise a range of activities for us: religious and political instruction, communal games and entertainments and, above all, “school”.

Among the adults there were some thirty qualified teachers and it was decided soon after our arrival in the camp that they should give us lessons in the usual subjects for one or two hours a day in order to compensate as far as possible for the loss of regular teaching as a result of the deportation. However, given the unfavourable conditions, including the shortage of adequate teaching materials and suitable

venues, their efforts did not prove very successful. While the weather was good the lessons could be held more or less undisturbed in the open. When autumn came we took refuge from the wind and rain in the dark, overcrowded huts, where the lessons had to compete with the noisy pursuits of the adults, and usually lost. The teachers did their best, but before long the students' commitment flagged, the absences due to illness or lack of interest multiplied, and the lessons gradually ran out of steam. I must admit that I myself do not remember actually attending any classes in Bergen-Belsen. I have either repressed the memory or managed to play truant all the time.

Despite the efforts of some adults to keep us in line, our behaviour became worse from day to day. Kolb's diary reports some alarming observations. The children's manners, he writes, are atrocious; they no longer seem to remember that "a minimum of education and politeness is demanded of them, too".³⁴ Their intellectual capacity is declining:

They have forgotten an enormous amount and can hardly read or do sums any more. Their memory is blurred, like that of the adults. Their imagination revolves round mundane things and they can hardly imagine the future, that is, a normal life.³⁵

Their relations with the adults amount to a vicious circle in which the "children suffer from the nervousness of their parents, and they in turn make their parents nervous".³⁶

Ultimately it was probably because the adults were too preoccupied with their own suffering to care about us that we were about to become neglected children. Ági Hendell's account of how the conduct of the older generation deprived us of any role models that we could have respected and followed seems particularly apt:

34. Kolb, *Tagebuch* 20-23 October 1944.

35. Kolb, *Tagebuch* 8-9 November 1944.

36. Kolb, *Tagebuch* 13-20 September 1944.

We were just observing the grown up people, how fast they lost their composure, their humanity. Everything that we were told that grown up people know it all and they are wise and we have to listen to them, it kind of evaporated in Bergen-Belsen because grown up people ... were not behaving the way we children expected them to behave.³⁷



Towers

Bergen-Belsen left its mark on all of us, but while many adults struggled in later life to overcome the trauma, most of us who were children at the time seem to have grown up without any conspicuous handicaps. We were probably helped by not fully realising what might have happened to us if Kasztner's negotiations with Eichmann had broken down at any point.

When we left Budapest in the 35 cattle trucks we believed that we were on our way to France or Spain and from there across the Mediterranean to Palestine. But after a few hours' journey the train, still on Hungarian soil, stopped in a siding and did not budge for three days. It is possible that the fighting had made France impassable or that Eichmann was trying to extort a higher ransom from Kasztner – either way we were no longer going to Palestine. To make matters worse, someone reported that we were to be taken to a camp called Auspitz and someone else misheard this and

37. Hendell, Interview.

thought that we were going to Auschwitz. There was a panic that did not subside till we were well on our way west. It is worth mentioning that this panic casts considerable doubt on the allegation that no Hungarian Jew knew what deportation to Poland meant except Kasztner, who betrayed them all by his failure to raise the alarm.

Another panic occurred as we stopped in Linz in Austria and were marched to a military installation to be disinfected. I still remember the long wait, the heat, the crush, the embarrassment of standing around naked, and the nervousness of the adults who – as I now know – were wondering whether the showers would dispense water or gas.

The most upsetting experience was that of the first fifty women to enter the building. They were forcibly shaved all over by some Ukrainian attendants who believed that we were being deported to Auschwitz. These women suffered the worst trauma of the journey, as Miriam Buck explains: “Money, work, home – it was easier to part with all this than with one’s hair. It was the only ornament left, beauty, womanhood itself”.³⁸ Some of them never recovered from the shock. Éva Breslauer, aged seventeen, contracted pneumonia and died a month later, having lost the will to live.

Nine days after our departure from Budapest the train finally stopped at a long bare platform in the middle of the Lüneburg Heath some 60 km from Hannover. We were ordered out of the trucks by armed SS guards shouting threats and insults, with German shepherd dogs barking and straining at their leads. The witticism “Hurry up. It isn’t Sabbath today”³⁹, recalled by the author of the anonymous account, was the least offensive command by an SS sergeant. I was in too much of a daze to remember more than a general confusion, but Judy Jacobs reports what happened in vivid detail:

38. Miriam Buck, *Aufzeichnungen* [Notes], 1945, Yad Vashem and Bergen-Belsen Memorial, 2.

39. Anon, *Deportation*, 9.

We are told to walk in perfect formation, maybe four or five abreast, in straight lines, with whips in the hands of the guards ... Every 30 seconds, somebody would yell another insult at you ... It seemed like a tremendously long walk ... because by this time we were dehydrated and underfed and we had been sitting up in these cattle cars so our bones and joints were creaky ... and we were not really in the best of shape anyway.⁴⁰

It was at the end of this march that we reached Bergen-Belsen.

We had dreamt of a happy escape to Palestine and instead we found ourselves locked up in a German concentration camp. That is the meaning of the juxtaposition of the two towers in Irsai's drawing. Both the Tower of David in Jerusalem and the watchtower in Bergen-Belsen reach for the sky, but their fundamentally different purpose and appearance, underlined by the barbed wire between them, reveals the discrepancy between the wishful dream and the bleak reality. The writer of a long sarcastic letter, who is only known by the signature "Willi", pulls no punches in exposing our plight after failing to enter the Promised Land:

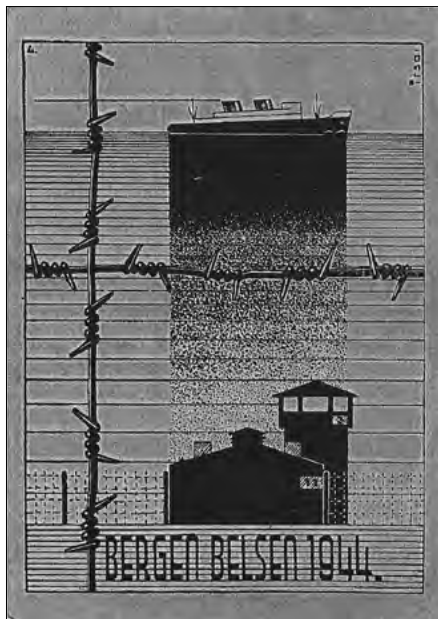
Here they were, in Bergen-Belsen, those smart Jewish VIPs, in a compound surrounded by guards, electric wire fences, watchtowers with searchlights and revolving machine guns, and not a sound, not a breath of theirs, could reach the world outside.⁴¹

In Budapest, before our departure, some people had done all they could to be admitted to the group, while others, who were invited by Kasztner and his committee, had refused and tried to hide instead, because they were afraid of becoming prisoners of the Germans. As day followed day and we remained captives behind the barbed-wire fences and watchtowers of Bergen-Belsen, more and more among us began to regret having sought freedom by the paradoxical means of

40. Judy Jacobs, Interview, 1.4.1966, Shoah Foundation.

41. Unknown: Letter signed "Willi", 1954, Yad Vashem and Bergen-Belsen Memorial.

delivering themselves to the Nazis. Szidonia Devecseri, for instance, confesses: “Who knows whether we will ever get out of this hell we had walked into almost voluntarily in our fear of deportation ... Leaning on the barbed wire, I wept.”⁴² At our lowest moments we were close to abandoning all hope of – both literally and metaphorically – emerging from the shadow of the watchtower, crossing the barbed wire and finding ourselves in the realm of David’s Tower. Thanks to Kasztner’s persistence we



Hut, watchtower, steamer

were finally released from Bergen-Belsen, but with only a few weeks to spare before starvation and diseases began to kill thousands. We could easily have suffered the same fate.

The haunting image of the steamer floating above the watchtower and the hut could well be called “De profundis”. In the depth the dark mass of the hut and the watchtower, with an obtrusive segment of barbed wire in the foreground, alludes to our precarious situation at the mercy of the SS, who could decide either to release or to exterminate us at any moment. The elegant steamer in the light high above could be carrying us to the Promised Land or leaving us to our fate in Bergen-Belsen. The reflection of the steamer, reaching towards the submerged camp but stopping short of it, establishes a link between the two realms while leaving the final message intriguingly open. If the

42. Devecseri, *Unser Schicksal*, 5.

gap between the steamer and the camp were closed one could assume that the inmates will be able to rise to freedom; if it widened till the reflection was no longer visible the separation between the inmates and freedom would become absolute.

We had left Budapest in the belief that we would soon be landing in Palestine. Our arrival in Bergen-Belsen had put a shocking end to that dream. Nevertheless, our Zionist leaders continued their efforts at making us fit for a new life in an independent Jewish state. We were learning Hebrew, studying Jewish history, and planning to live and work on a kibbutz – in short, we were still hoping that we would somehow reach Palestine once Kasztner had freed us from the Nazis. I for one liked to imagine him tearing up the barbed wire with his bare hands and leading us out of Bergen-Belsen between the two rows of huts flanking the main street of the camp, rather like Moses leading our ancestors out of Egypt with dry feet between the divided waters of the Red Sea.

After our first 320 fellow-captives had left Bergen-Belsen for Switzerland the rest of us felt left in a limbo. We told ourselves that if they had gone we too were bound to go shortly, but when one day after another passed with no sign of our departure we became more and more depressed and angry. The patriotic dream of a Jewish state was not forgotten, but had receded into the background. The immediate question was when, if at all, we would reach Switzerland. Palestine could await its turn. My own moods swung between indifference and sudden fits of impatience, when I drove people to distraction by constantly asking when we would be going to Switzerland.

Towards what at last turned out to be the end of our captivity the uncertainty was becoming harder and harder to bear. There were rumours involving Switzerland, but as our release seemed to move close on one day and to fade into the distance the next, our feelings oscillated wildly between confidence and dejection. Any event that we could interpret as a good omen – a casual remark by one of the Germans, a demand from the camp command for our files, a consignment of gift

parcels from the Swiss Red Cross – filled us with euphoria, anything suggesting the contrary, with black despair. Kolb’s diary contains a remarkable blow-by-blow account of these ups and downs.

On 18 November the camp commander told our leaders that our departure was imminent. Kolb noted: “Within seconds the whole camp is up. Loud jubilation.” When nothing had happened by 22 November he wrote: “People’s mood is at point zero. They have done the worst to us. Instead of leaving us to our lethargy ... the news has upset our lives, made feelings run high, and now everybody has plunged again to the depths.” On 23 November the atmosphere improved dramatically when a letter from Kasztner announced our imminent departure. Kolb remarked sarcastically: “We are all excited, there is not one pessimist in the whole camp”. When nothing happened again by 28 November he observed: “Our mood has plummeted from the heights into the depths. ... No news about our departure, many patients with headaches and upset stomachs.” On 1 December he continued in the same vein: “Hope fades. Our mood is very bad. People in the camp cannot bear extreme fluctuations. Everyone explodes against everyone else.”⁴³ Six days later – with the exception of a few unfortunate families the Germans had held back for bureaucratic reasons or out of vindictiveness – we were in Switzerland.

Miryam Sommerfeld told me that her father imagined the ship in his drawing full of happy Jews on their way to a new life in a free Jewish state. When he created this enigmatic work he could not know whether we would leave Bergen-Belsen alive, let alone ever see a Jewish state. But the war ended in May 1945, six months after our arrival in Switzerland, and in August about half of the group emigrated jointly to Palestine, while the rest gradually returned to Hungary or settled in other countries. To some extent Irsai’s artistic vision had become a reality. What happened to this reality in the seven decades that followed is a different story.

43. Kolb, *Tagebuch* 18 November - 1 December 1944.

Friends of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies

We invite you to join the group of supporters whose contributions help to underpin the work of the Centre.

The annual subscription is £25.00
(£15.00 for students and the unwaged)

As a Friend of the Centre you will be entitled to:

- Prior notice of, and invitations to lectures, conferences and exhibitions both at the University of Sussex and in London
- Complimentary Centre for German-Jewish Studies research papers
- Opportunities to meet distinguished speakers and lecturers at special receptions
- The Newsletter of the Centre
- The Centre's Annual Report
- Regular reports about activities and events in which the Centre is participating
- Special discounts on publications produced by the Centre

If you would like to join, please contact:

Diana Franklin, Centre Manager

E: d.franklin@sussex.ac.uk

T/F: +44 (0) 208 455 4785

The logo of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies, the Star of David encircled by a rose, symbolizes the ideal of co-operation between the two communities.



It derives from a decorative motif in the old synagogue at Dresden, constructed to the designs of Gottfried Semper in 1840, destroyed by the Nazis in 1938.

For further information, please contact:

The Director
Centre for German-Jewish Studies
Arts Building
University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9QN

E: g.reuveni@sussex.ac.uk

This is a publication of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies,
University of Sussex.

www.sussex.ac.uk/cgjs

All copyright remains with the author.

Price: £8.00