

Béla Borsi-Kálmán

Memories of the Jewish Community of Szinérváralja⁸¹

“In my dreams I often see the hoarfrost glistening on the windowpanes of Szinérváralja”⁸²

Introduction

I must begin with an episode that is now, alas, part of literary history: in the course of my fairly long career in amateur football I played for some eight years between 1976 and 1986 in minor-league football with the late, great writer Péter Esterházy (1950–2016). My varied and extensive memories of him I placed on record only quite recently.⁸³ Some of these concern the fact that I was unknowingly witness to the birth of the maestro’s justly emblematic work, *Termelési-regény (kisszregény)* [Novel of Production] (Budapest, Magvető, 1979), which is, as is well-known, strongly football-centric. And, of course, it already bears the imprint of what was to become his trademark style: a loose but heady brew of unceasing flashes of wit, divagations, pub anecdotes, football stories and philosophical meditations. This might be called an incomparable pot-pourri from someone of aristocratic descent and proletarian provincial footballistics that does not, to put it mildly, make him an easy read. And as for his translators, it makes them want to tear their hair out, as there are few who can provide straightforward versions of these typically Esterházyan squibs – especially those set on the football-pitch – whether in English,

⁸¹ An edited and substantially expanded version of a paper read on 5 February 2018 in Budapest at the conference *Többes kötésben. Magyar zsidó múltak és égtájak* [Multiple Binds. Hungarian Jewish Pasts and Landscapes]. The author would like to express his thanks to his uncle, the late Béla Kálmán Sr., (Szinérváralja, 10 June 1943 – 20 January 2020), his brothers Pál Kálmán (b. Szinérváralja, 5 November 1943) and Sándor Kálmán (b. Szinérváralja, 26 September 1954), József Nagy and Márton Szmuck (b. Szinérváralja, 1950) for their help in the preparation of this essay. (*Translator’s note*: Szinérváralja in Transylvania (Romania) is known in Romanian as Seini. Throughout, wherever possible, the Hungarian placename is followed, after a forward slash, by its current Romanian version, but in order to save space only on the first occasion that it is mentioned.)

⁸² Courtesy of one of Majsi Izsák’s daughters, June 2008 (Tel Aviv).

⁸³ Béla Borsi-Kálmán: Emlékek és reflexiók EP „Mesterről” (I.) Változatok az „aha-élményre” (részletek) [Memories and reflections of ‘maestro’ Péter Esterházy, part 1. Variations on the “aha-moment” (extracts)]. *Korunk*, 28. (2017), 10. 89–95; Béla Borsi-Kálmán: Emlékek és reflexiók EP „Mesterről” (II.) [Memories and reflections of ‘maestro’ Péter Esterházy, part 2. Variations on the “aha-moment” (extracts)]. *Korunk*, 28. (2017), 11. 105–111. In book form: Béla Borsi-Kálmán: *Pseudo-fociesszék. Szélgjegyzetek a futball, a politika és az irodalom forrásvidékéről* [Pseudo-football Essays. Notes from the Headwaters of Football, Politics and Literature]. Budapest, L’Harmattan, 2018. 165–226.

German or French, particularly if they have never kicked a ball in their life. I happen to know this because in the summer of 1984, just as the European Championships were being held in France (12–27 June), I returned for ten days to Paris about a year after my 1982–1983 research scholarship ended, to act as unofficial interpreter for a monolingual ex-ministry of the interior official turned “entrepreneur” (in his case, a dealer in garden furniture in Transdanubia), and in what little free time remained at my disposal I looked up some of my French friends. One of them, the Breton-born Michel Prigent (1948–2017), who until March 2015 taught Hungarian history at the Sorbonne’s Inalco, at one point during dinner struck his forehead with the palm of his hand and exclaimed: “But hey, you play football! So you must surely know the French for the Hungarian terms *les* “offside”, *megkerülő*s “outflanking”, *esernyő* “umbrella movement” and especially *kötény* “nutmeg” and all their fellows...” Soon it turned out that he just happened to be living with the writer Sophie Képès, who was Hungarian on her father’s side and was at that very moment wrestling, together with Ágnes Járfás (subsequently Esterházy’s regular French translator), with his *Novel of Production*. So it happened, by a twist of fate, that I was responsible for the transmission⁸⁴ of these technical terms into the text of the poetically-entitled French version of the book.⁸⁵

The conversation then took an unexpected turn: Sophie, having discovered that I hailed from northern Transylvania, in fact from the Partium, and that a main research interest of mine was Hungarian–Romanian relations (with special reference to the eighteenth to twentieth centuries), told me she had an elderly aunt in Paris, Eva Kepes (Budapest, 1913 – Paris, 9 June 1994), who following a year in Berlin, arrived in Paris in 1938 and spent nearly all of the rest of her life there, first as dancer, then as an actress and later as the mother to three children. Then, at the age of fifty, she decided to start a new life: she divorced her Hungarian husband, bought paints and brushes, and set up a little studio a few steps from the Sorbonne, on the fifth floor of a block of flats in the rue Cujas, and from then on turned out one beautiful painting after another.⁸⁶ By then Sophie spoke rather good Hungarian and was keen to unearth the roots of the Hungarian branch of her family, which reached back to Transylvania and the Partium: she had often asked her father and his relatives about these as a teenager, but seemed to hit a brick wall. She received no answers to any of her questions and had to make do with the occasional anecdote whose origins were never explained, and they often turned a deaf ear to her inquiries. Only the eccentric Eva Kepes was somewhat more willing to talk: it was from her that she discovered that one branch of the family had a patent of nobility bearing the words *Vári Kepes de Szinyérváralja*. She was reluctant to believe this and when she grew up thought that the claim to the title of nobility was made up, knowing enough

⁸⁴ I seem to recall (unfortunately I am unable to confirm it) that the word “transmission” actually appears in my handwritten dedication to her of my first book, *Együtt vagy külön utakon* [Together or Taking Separate Ways]. Budapest, Magvető Kiadó, 1984.

⁸⁵ *Trois anges me surveillent* [Three Angels Stand Guard over Me], roman de Péter Esterházy (Gallimard, 1989, en collaboration avec Agnès Jarfas).

⁸⁶ See Sophie Képès: Les vies d’Eva. *La Revue des Ressources*, 9 January 2011.

about Hungarian history to be aware that in historic Hungary many middle-class families who had made good, among them Germans, Serbs, Greeks, Macedo-Romanians,⁸⁷ but also many Jews, were only too happy to buy, from the eighteenth century onwards but right up to the end of the nineteenth, noble titles and ranks of various kinds adorned, naturally, with suitable fancy “nobiliary particles” (in Hungarian these are prefixed to the surname – *trans.*). She was justified in thinking, then, that “szinyérváraljai” might well be one such nobiliary prefix.

She never actually saw the “sheepskin” that traditionally bore the letters patent of nobility and did not know whether it was ever in her aunt’s possession, or if she had merely heard it spoken of when she was a little girl, and of course it may well be that it had been lost in the meantime. Purely as a matter of curiosity it is worth mentioning that the poet Miklós Radnóti notes in his *Diary* the name of one of his wife Fanni Gyarmati’s relatives (the bank manager Sándor Gyarmati). What is noteworthy is not so much that he changed his name from Gutmann to Gyarmati, but that he is given in our source with the nobiliary prefix “szinyérváraljai” even after the name-change!⁸⁸



A painting by Eva Kepes

I can no longer recall whether it was Sophie Képès or I who was more surprised by our dialogue. Because it so happens that somehow Szinyérváralja, or rather as it has been

⁸⁷ See Béla Borsi-Kálmán: *Elvetélt bizánci reneszánszból Nagy-Románia. Egy állameszme etnogenezise* [From Aborted Byzantine Renaissance to Greater Romania. The Ethnogenesis of a State Idea]. Budapest, Magyar Szemle Könyvek, 2018. (esp. 59–136, 189–227).

⁸⁸ See Endre Czeizel: *Költők, gének, titkok. A magyar költőgénuszok családfaelemzése* [Poets, Genes, Secrets. Analysing the Family Trees of Hungarian Poet Geniuses]. Budapest, Galenus Kiadó, 2001.174.

known since 1907, Szinérváralja, is not just a real place but, in fact, the truly picturesque little medieval market town where I spent my entire childhood. It was no accident that because of its splendid geographical location it was originally called “the town of the seven hills”.⁸⁹ It was also the birthplace of, among others, the noted grammarian and Bible translator János Erdősi Sylvester (c. 1504–1552), now widely recognised as the compiler of the first grammar of Hungarian and the father of Hungarian linguistic scholarship as well as of the Hungarian essay.⁹⁰

Of pre-1920 Szinérváralja and its environs, as well as its society, which had become middle-class despite preserving many archaic features, a – literally – picturesque account is provided in his spellbinding autobiography by the painter János Incze, born there in 1909 (though he later settled in Dés/Dej).⁹¹ Indirect (and, of course, subjective) evidence of this area’s isolation is provided by the fact that the environment that the famous painter’s virtually photographic memory recalled of the 1910s differs hardly a jot from what has remained in the memory of myself, the future historian, regarding the conditions, the culture and the mentality of the 1950s. Thus, half a century flew by almost without any change, apart from, naturally, changes in respect of the authorities in charge and the consolidation of the town’s Romanian character – which, interestingly, is mentioned by Incze only in passing.⁹² Incze has the following to say on this topic: “Szinérváralja in my childhood (1909–1920) was a *nagyközség* [major village as an administrative division – trans.], the centre of one of the ten *járás* [lower-level administrative districts – trans.] of Szatmár/Satu Mare county. On the Várhegy the ruins of its medieval castle can still be clearly seen, though many of its stones have been carried off. When I was small that is where we would go for a day out, the stones of the curious great hall still stood more or less intact, but everything was covered in vegetation, thick nutbushes and other shrubs, oaks and wild cherry trees. The ruins were shrouded in a mysterious world of fable: one of my friends told me that his father had crawled into one of the cavities under the walls and reached something dark and tunnel-like, but though it glittered with gold he saw an incubus sitting on a cauldron and got such a fright that he never dared

⁸⁹ See József Anderco et al.: *Szinérváralja. A héthegyű város. Rendhagyó monográfia* [Szinérváralja. The Town of the Seven Hills. An Unorthodox Monograph]. Nagybánya, Genius Kiadó, 2015.

⁹⁰ Anderco et al. (2015): op. cit. 134–144.

⁹¹ János Incze: *Önarckép* [Self-portrait]. Bukarest, Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1982 (see esp. 8, 9–47).

⁹² This may, of course, be explained at least in part by (self-)censorship, since Incze published his work in 1982, in the darkest years of Ceaușescu. The Romanian character of Szinérváralja is adumbrated all the more clearly in the following publication: Claudiu Porumbăcean – Viorel Câmpean – Sándor Kereskényi: *Oameni din Seini* [People of Szinérváralja]. Arad–Satu Mare, Editura “Vasile Goldiș” University Press Arad – Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, 2013.

venture there again”.⁹³ He continues: “The name of the town, Szinér, which was folk-etymologised as szines ér, “coloured vein”, was explained to me by [our teacher, István] Fábíán:⁹⁴ veins of pure gold were found here, because the whole area – Tótfalu/Tăuți de Jos, Nagybánya/Baia Mare, Felsőbánya/Baia Sprie and Kapnikbánya/Cavnic – is one vast goldfield. The area was also known as Asszonypataka (Frauenbach), supposedly because all the income from it always ended up in the queen’s purse [...]. Here the Reformation stretched a long way back: not far away is Borpatak, Miszt/Tăuți, Mogyorós/Măgherăuş, Tótfalu, the birthplace of the famous printer and punch-cutter Miklós Misztótfalusi Kis. János Erdősi Sylvester [see above – trans.], was born in Szinérváralja in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. For a long time the adherents of the Reformation were not permitted to build churches here, even the building of the present church was subject to special conditions: it had to be at the end of the village and none of its doors or windows could look out onto the street in case that blighted the peace and morals of the true believers. A fine stone pillar was raised in the market place to commemorate Sylvester, the railings surrounding it being used by the linen-drapers to display their wares, with the clotted cream sellers sitting at its base”.⁹⁵

And I would add that Sylvester’s column was already to be found in the cemetery of the Calvinist church when I was a child. It was a tall column of granite that, I discovered, had indeed earlier stood in the main square, in the market, and was moved to its present site after the Romanian occupation, with the “change of regime”.⁹⁶

⁹³ Incze (1982): op. cit. 37. (I heard such tales and legends myself as a little boy: my grandmother and my aunt claimed to know that the castle ruins were linked to the nearby fortress of Aranyosmeggyes/Medieşu Aurit by a secret tunnel, a section of which supposedly ran under Uncle Kiss’s pigsty. Incidentally, I seem to recall that the wife of Uncle Kiss, a cooper and wheelwright originally from the Zips region, and Uncle Feri Merli’s wife were sisters, that is to say, they both married Jewish women.)

⁹⁴ The Calvinist teacher István Fábíán, father of the Calvinist writer György Fábíán (1912–1980), who edited the weekly *Szinyér* for many years. Porumbăcean et al. (2013): op. cit. 147.

⁹⁵ Incze (1982): op. cit. 37–38.

⁹⁶ Even the Inczes did not count as “autochthonous”: I discovered only in 2001 that “the Incze family came here from some Calvinist area of Székelyland. I see from baptismal records that my great-great-grandfather Sámuel lived in Nagybánya, and his son, my great-grandfather János, returned there after the fighting in 1848, married and had a son, also János, my grandfather, who was born there in 1857. He was apprenticed to a cooper and when he became a master of his trade, he married, in Nagybánya, Róza Szmájkovszky of Felsőbánya. As there was no demand for coopering in Nagybánya, he moved to wine country: Szinérváralja”. Incze (1982): op. cit. 8.



On the right of this postcard from between the wars can be seen Szinérváralja's Catholic church, while the church on the left belonged until 1948 to the Romanian Greek Catholics, passing subsequently to the Romanian Orthodox. The building between the two churches was the Hungarian-language general school, where – in the rear of the building – teaching continued in the 1950s. (In the background: Szinyér castle. In front of the Catholic church: the main square.)

But at the time all that Sophie's communication brought to mind was an anecdote I had heard as a child, I think from my grandfather (whose barber's shop was on the main square) about one of the male members of the Kepes family. Apparently this Kepes, who ran a prosperous outfitter's in the heart of Szinérváralja, took out – this was perhaps in the very early 1920s – a valuable insurance policy on his premises, lest it be struck by any natural disaster. Not long afterwards a fire broke out in the shop, the building burnt to a cinder, and the owner, whose first name I cannot now recall, collected the substantial insurance money and disappeared for ever from Szinérváralja. The story has no anti-Semitic overtones – I remember it more as a typical piece of Hungarian gentry bravado: here was someone, a local Hungarian, who was clever enough to get the better of the Romanian nation state.

The childhood anecdote and what I later heard from Sophie Képès did not, however, let me rest and so, around the turn of the century, I think in 2001 or 2002, I decided to visit the Jewish cemetery of Szinérváralja, whose caretaker at the time happened to be a former schoolmate of mine, one of the Bereczki girls.⁹⁷ I could hardly believe my eyes: in the cemetery (which when I was a child was the town's most popular place to sleigh and

⁹⁷ Julianna Bereczki attended the same class as I between September 1955 and June 1960 in the local Hungarian-language general school and remains to this day this cemetery's caretaker. There is, unfortunately, very little about Szinérváralja in Erika Márta Kiss's doctoral dissertation *Erdély zsidóközösségei a kezdetektől napjainkig a temetők tükrében* [Cemeteries as Sources of Information about the Jewish Communities of Transylvania, from the Beginnings Down to Our Time]. Budapest Jewish University, 2014, which is otherwise an excellent, thoroughly documented work.

ski) the most striking gravestone, carved of black granite, happened to be that of Lajos Kepes, who according to the inscription on it received sometime in the 1820s a patent of nobility for services to the early promotion of capitalism in greater Hungary (what I have called “the evolution of the nobility into the middle-class”).⁹⁸ One of his descendants was Ferencz Kepess [sic] (1 November 1818 – 9 August 1897), “miller and landowner”, whose wife Helén Kepes died aged 102 on 12 October 1912.

So Eva Kepes was not talking through her hat!

It was also around this time, April 2001, when I was first sent to Paris, that I began to think more about my childhood memories of the Jews of Szinerválja, as the correcting of the proofs of an interview – that I had given to Béla Bíró at Christmas 1993,⁹⁹ but which only appeared in a volume of mine published in 2002¹⁰⁰ – brought more and more memories to the surface.

I had some serendipity in my research, too, because some years ago on the internet I chanced upon a rare specialist work, in which I found the following paragraph, supporting my view that the town was very much on the way to becoming middle-class:

Today Szinyerválja ranks among the most advanced market towns as regards both social and cultural achievements. It is the seat of a district court, a magistracy, and home to a land registry and a tax office. It boasts a state primary school, as well as Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Calvinist and Jewish schools, a state girls’ school, and a nursery. Evidence of its advanced social development is provided by its many societies, among them two casinos, and its lively economic life is evidenced by two flourishing financial institutions. With regard to its industry, particularly worth mentioning and, indeed, visiting is the interesting *Andesite and Syenite Fumery Manufacturing of Sándor Kepes*,

⁹⁸ Cf. Ferenc Németh: [Zsidó kereskedők szerepe a magyar polgárosodásban. Beszélgetés Bácskai Vera gazdaságtörténésszel](#) [The Role of Jewish Traders in Hungarian Embourgeoisement. A Conversation with the Historian of Economics Vera Bácskai]. *Szombat*, 1 March 1991.

⁹⁹ Béla Borsi-Kálmán: Az ideális „asszimiláns” [The Ideal ‘Assimilee’]. *Korunk*, (1995), 2; Béla Borsi-Kálmán: „A feladat” [‘The Task’]. *Jelenkor*, (1995), 3, collected in: Béla Borsi-Kálmán: *Kihívás és eretnecség – Adalékok a román–magyar viszony történetéhez* [Challenges and Heresy. Contributions to the History of Romanian–Hungarian Relations]. Sepsiszentgyörgy, Kaláka Könyvek, 1996. 96–111; Béla Borsi-Kálmán: *Polgárosodott nemes avagy (meg)nemesedett polgár. Írások a „nemesi polgárisodás” témaköréből* [Noble into Bourgeois, or Bourgeois Transformed into Noble. Writings On the “Nobility’s Embourgeoisement”]. Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó, 2002. 223–292, Romanian translation by Livia Bacăru in Geo Șerban (ed.): *Budapesta literară și artistică. Interferențe, identitate modernă, tentația Occidentului*. In *Caiete Europene – 1998*. București, Editura Univers, 1998. 178–191, French version: *Histoire d’une vie. Quelques idées sur les conditions de formation des intellectuels hongrois originaires de Roumanie à l’époque de Kádár (1962–1989)*. In Catherine Durandin (ed.): *L’engagement des intellectuels à l’Est. Mémoires et analyses de Roumanie et Hongrie*. Bucarest, Institut Français de Bucarest, Éditions l’Harmattan, 1994. 71–80, collected in: Béla Borsi-Kálmán: *Liaisons risquées. Hongrois et Roumains aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles* (ed. Michel A. Prigent). Pécs, Éditions Jelenkor, Petite Europe, 1999. 280–290.

¹⁰⁰ Az ideális „asszimiláns” avagy a „feladat” (Bíró Béla beszélgetése a szerzővel) [The Ideal ‘Assimilee’, or the ‘Task’ (Béla Bíró in Conversation with the Author)], Borsi-Kálmán (2002): op. cit.

founded in 1891¹⁰¹ [...]. It has 50–60 permanent employees in a region where, as a result of the ravages of phylloxera, those who had hitherto been employed in viticulture had become unable to earn a living [...]. The products of this industrial site compare well with those from overseas in terms of both quality and price [...].¹⁰²

Further proof of the dynamism of Szinérváralja is provided by the fact that between 1897 and 1944 it even had a publishing house: Jakab Wieder's printing press. This published, among others, Dr Jakab Singer's important work on the rabbis of Temesvár/Timișoara in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Temesvári rabbik a XVIII. és XIX. században*. The publishing house of "Jacob Wieder and his son Juda published 145 works in Hebrew and Yiddish between 1905 and 1944", according to the monograph on Szinérváralja. This makes it, therefore, "the third largest Jewish printing press, after those of Máramarosziget/Sighetu Marmăției and Szatmárnémeti/Satu Mare"¹⁰³ in greater Transylvania (i.e. when the Partium and the Banat are included).

The author of these lines is aware, despite the materials recorded above, that he has undertaken what is virtually a "mission impossible", since the Jewish community whose fate he is attempting to record thanks to his fading memory has long ceased to exist, the vast majority of their number having emigrated at the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s to what they still called "Palestine" (i.e. Israel). Their numbers had already been severely depleted during the Shoah, as the Jewish population of Szinérváralja and its environs – already mostly well on the way to Magyarisation – "were deported in the spring of 1944 to the Szatmárnémeti ghetto and thence to Auschwitz".¹⁰⁴ We know from the work of Géza Komoróczy that in 1944 the Orthodox community's rabbi was the former wine-merchant Ábrahám Schwarz, the population was 615 (this must refer to the number of families), and its assets consisted of "the synagogue, the abbatoir of the manor, the rabbi's residence, the homes of the ritual slaughterers, the ritual bath; the state tax-base of its members was 1.5 million pengő, tax revenue from the religious community was

¹⁰¹ The name of Sándor Kepes, "monumental and funerary mason", also appears in the monograph *Szinérváralja*, as the creator of the Rákóczi memorial in Tiszabecs unveiled on 20 September 1903. The memorial can also be seen on contemporary postcards. The text on its base reads (in translation) "Szatmár county/Ugocea county/Szatmár-Németi Royal Free City/20 Sept. 1903", followed by "Kepes Sz. Váralja". Anderco et al. (2015): op. cit. 173–174.

¹⁰² See Kálmán Palmer et al. (eds.): *Nagybánya és környéke. A Magyar Országos Kohászati Egyesület első vándorgyűlése alkalmára* [Nagybánya and its Environs. On the occasion of the first peripatetic meeting of the Pan-Hungarian Metallurgical Union]. Nagybánya: printed by Mihály Molnár, 1894. 315–316. (Emphasis in the original.) Cited in: Béla Borsi-Kálmán: *Zsidók Temesvárott... és széles e világban. Esszék a magyar–zsidó (zsidó–magyar) szimbiózis történetéből* [The Jews in Temesvár... and Elsewhere in This Wide World. Essays on the history of the Hungarian–Jewish (Jewish–Hungarian) symbiotic relationship]. Budapest, Lucidus Kiadó, 2014. 303.

¹⁰³ Anderco et al. (2015): op. cit. 46.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 47.

23,000 pengő, of which the gabella [goods tax – trans.] was 5,000 pengő, and income from the mikve 2,200 pengő”.¹⁰⁵

Of the town’s 700 or so Jews in 1930, forming a not inconsiderable 12.92% of the town’s population, only a fraction survived the war: altogether no more than about 150 returned.¹⁰⁶

The result of hope springing up anew and the sense that they had returned with a new identity and a keenness to make a new start – and not least the irresistible pull of a new homeland on the horizon, a state entity still not yet known by the name of Israel – was that in the survivor families a number of children were born between 1945 and 1948: those of my own generation. But their parents, quite understandably, did not see their future as “building socialism in the ‘people’s democracy’” of Romania: the overwhelming majority of them went on Aliyah to Israel between 1953 and 1965. The few families who, for various reasons, had to stay on a little longer, left their homeland a few years later, by the mid-to-late 1970s. Nowadays, all that remains of Szinerválja’s Jewish population is Márton Szmuck, now aged about 70, the son of cinema technician ‘Uncle’ Szmuck, born in 1950,¹⁰⁷ and an elderly lady, also from a mixed marriage,¹⁰⁸ in addition to the imposing synagogue, majestic even in its dilapidated state, and the gloriously laid out Jewish cemetery under the ruins of the castle of Szinerválja, at the mouth of the Közpatok river, an area even today populated mostly by Hungarian Calvinists.

This voluntarily undertaken task is further complicated by the fact that the person recalling this past – me – has himself no Jewish identity and all his ancestors – apart from

¹⁰⁵ I thank Géza Komoróczy for supplying these very valuable supplementary data by e-mail.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. According to more detailed figures from Béla Szilágyi in 2001, of the total population of Szinerválja in 1910, i.e. 5,360 souls, no less than 634 (11.8%) belonged to the “Israelite denomination”. According to the Romanian census of 1930, this figure rose to 663 (12.92%), while the total population declined somewhat. Adalbert-Béla Szilágyi (ed.): *Szinerválja. Sárvár–Szinerválja, Az RMDSZ Szinerváljai Szervezete*, 2001. (Statistical data on p. 12.)

¹⁰⁷ The family of Adolf Szmuck, originally from Máramarosziget (1898–1965), like that of Szender Friedmann, was wiped out in Auschwitz, so he remarried, his second wife also being a Christian. Szmuck senior refused to say anything about the suffering he had endured to his son Márton, who only found out about them after his death – along with the fact that his father had a second, also Christian, family with three children with whom he has no contact of any kind: he does not know whether they remained in Romania or emigrated to Israel. Márton Szmuck’s request to emigrate to Israel in the mid-1960s was not endorsed by Nagybánya’s Jewish community, probably because his mother was not Jewish. Be that as it may, he quarrelled with his denomination and therefore remained in the land of his birth. He too married a Christian Hungarian, this time from nearby Vámfalu/Vama. Of their three boys, one is an army officer currently stationed in the Romanian capital following service with NATO in the USA, the second has a business selling car-parts in Chicago, while the youngest runs a successful small firm in Nagybánya selling refrigerators. The author is grateful to Márton Szmuck for this additional information.

¹⁰⁸ Szender Friedmann, a tanner, having likewise lost his family in the Holocaust, also remarried and had a daughter, Rózsika, who in turn married another former classmate of mine, József Czeiszperger (Zeiszperger), from Szinerválja’s community of Catholic “Danube Swabians”, which had completely Magyarised by the end of the nineteenth century.

one great-grandmother baptised a Catholic¹⁰⁹ – lived out their lives in the Calvinist faith. So much so, that the first person in the Kálmán family to graduate from high school, my father,¹¹⁰ attended the renowned Bethlen Kollégium at Nagyenyed/Aiud between 1933 and 1940¹¹¹ and was unable to receive his teaching certificate in June 1941 in the ceremonial hall of his alma mater because history, in the form of the Vienna Award of 30 August 1940, supervened and the graduating class was absorbed by the Catholic teacher training college of Kolozsvár. The parent institution, however, along with the vast sea of memories that the graduands cherished all their life,¹¹² remained stranded in southern Transylvania, along with many tens of thousands of ethnic Hungarians.

A further difficulty for this memorist is that – apart from the already mentioned but little-known memoirs of the well-known Szinérváralja-born painter János Incze, in a booklet published around the turn of this century,¹¹³ and the short monograph already quoted from several times – to the best of his knowledge no work of literature or history has so far been devoted exclusively to the history of Szinérváralja's Jews. This is the case despite the Romanian-language biographical account mentioned earlier, which mentions, of the numerous famous Jewish or partly Jewish personalities associated with Szinérváralja, only Pál Szende's career.¹¹⁴

Thus, apart from my own, not especially extensive research,¹¹⁵ I am perforce obliged to rely largely on my own childhood memories.

My first memories connected with Jews I can barely summon up concretely, for a child growing up treats everything as natural and it never occurs to him that some things are perhaps not. A sliver of memory of this kind concerns the hospital in Nagybánya where, at the age of five,

¹⁰⁹ Otilia Móricz of Nábrád (1858 – c. 1910), my great-grandfather, Ferencz Kálmán's wife and mother of my paternal grandfather, Béla Kálmán, Sr. (Fehérgyarmat, 1887 – Szinérváralja, 1963).

¹¹⁰ Béla György Kálmán (Szinérváralja, 18 February 1920 – Verőcemasos, 5 December 2000).

¹¹¹ Just like János Incze, some years earlier (Anderco et al. [2015]: op. cit. 113.)

¹¹² My father kept a vast number of photographs of what he called his 'golden years', his student years at Nagyenyed, which he frequently showed off to his teenage sons at the end of the 1950s. Indeed, he rarely talked of anything else. This is the basis of my genuinely *secondary* Transylvanian identity, for until the summer of 1970 (discounting a three-week stint in a pioneer camp in Szováta/Sovata in January 1958) I had not set foot in Inner Transylvania.

¹¹³ Szilágyi (2001): op. cit. 3–54. (Statistical data on p. 12.)

¹¹⁴ Porumbăcean (2013): op. cit. 67–69. Of the Jews of Szinérváralja and their synagogue only these sentences occur in the volume: "In those days [sc. the 1950s] several Jewish families lived in the town centre and in Vasút Street. In the latter stood the imposing synagogue which on Saturdays filled with worshippers of the Mosaic faith". (p. VI). In line with my own memories, Márton Szmuck told me that in the 1950s the synagogue was always full on Shabbat and on the high holidays. (For this reason for a long time I mistakenly thought that the community suffered little during the Shoah. Alas, the opposite was the case.)

¹¹⁵ See notes 18 and 19.

sometime in the spring of 1953, I had my tonsils removed by a Romanian surgeon and I spent about ten days in a ward with grown-up women. Of course, my mother would visit me every day and take me out into the corridor, where there was on one occasion another patient, also with his mother. We sat quite close to them and so willy-nilly overheard their conversation. I do not, of course, remember anything they actually said, but the way the boy – who was about my age – spoke, his turns of phrase and his intonation I recall finding unusual and at the same time very intelligent and attractive. It was his way of thinking and the sing-song pattern of his speech that entranced me. I also definitely recall that it occurred to me: how nice it would be if I, too, were ever so “intelligent”! In retrospect, though I have no evidence of any kind for the notion, I think mother and son must have belonged to those members of the Nagybánya Jewish community who were about to go on Aliyah, to emigrate. And also, from roughly this time, the figure of my grandfather, the elderly Béla Kálmán, a retired master barber, looms up, as he converses on the street with the shochet¹¹⁶ in his traditional hard black hat, around 1952–1953, obviously about political events that have filtered down to the farthest corners of the province of Máramaros/Țara Marmatei. Another fragmentary memory: on one of the major Jewish holidays, one of the schohet’s superiors (probably from Szatmár) visited the Szinérváralja Jewish community and the two highly respectable gentlemen, on their way to the synagogue, stood before this 6- or 7-year-old, who stared at them wide-eyed as, while they brushed down their hard hats with a clothes brush, they improvised coverings for their bald pates with handkerchieves knotted at the corners, to ensure that not even for this brief moment should they offend against the precepts of their religion. This memory was no doubt easier to summon up because we lived only two doors down from the shochet.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ In Hebrew שוחט *shochet* “slaughterer” is thus not simply the Jewish butcher or, in older Hungarian “kaszab”. I only recently realised that it has a somewhat pejorative overtone, so that “slaughterer” is more acceptable as a translation. Generally, as in the case of the Szinérváralja community downgraded as a result of the Shoah, he as a God-fearing believer also fulfilled other community functions, such as religious “supervisor”, the person who knows and adheres to the rules and regulations (and ensures others do so, too), for no rabbi was appointed here after 1944! Additionally, he knows all about the various parts of the animals, has to pass a rigorous examination and possesses an appropriate rabbinical certificate. In other words, he carries out serious and confidential tasks. This was in every respect a post suited to the elderly Laufer! (The author would like to thank József Nagy for this valuable supplementary information.)

¹¹⁷ The people next door were, on both sides, Romanians: the Săsărans on the right and the Mădăians on the left. Old Mr Săsăran was a notable personage because it was he who generally sat on St Michael’s horse on the hearse that was kept in the back of the courtyard. By the way, every member of the Săsăran family, notably the three children who were my father’s contemporaries, spoke perfect Hungarian (old Cornel, who later moved to Zsombolya/Jimbolia, was one of my father’s closest Romanian friends), while the Mădăians spoke only broken Hungarian, the language of the former ruling power, just as did the more distant neighbours, the Marinescu and the Dan families. In both families there were boys about two years my senior, and if I think about it, ‘Bebi’ Dan must have been my first ‘teacher’ of Romanian, as he spoke not a word of Hungarian, just as the blond and blue-eyed son, ‘Dumi’ (Dumitru), of the Lenghels (Lengyels?), who lived in a rather dilapidated little house behind the Săsărans. They were non-Hungarian-speaking Jews and unfortunately I do not recall how they came to live in Szinérváralja. I believe they moved to Nagybánya around 1954 and I have not seen them since.

Another, associated reminiscence is of the shochet hanging up on a wire tied to a big tree in the yard the poultry – usually a goose – that had had its neck cut with a razor-sharp knife, so that it could bleed out in order to ensure it was not “treif” but ritually “kosher”.

These expressions I picked up from my grandmother, Ilona Kandó, who having been born in 1895, naturally attended the Hungarian-language primary school in Szinérváralja, along with many Jewish girls of her generation and became lifelong friends with the majority of them. Her best friend married the Roman Catholic clockmaker of Szinérváralja, Feri Merli, which shows that the natural commingling of the two religions and ethnicities was already underway in the first decade of the twentieth century, and continued even through the ominous 1930s and 1940s: of our acquaintances István Balogh, from a root-and-branch Catholic gentry family, also married a Jewish woman, the elegant “Auntie Mira”, mother of the rather pretty Zsuzsi Balogh, a classmate of mine born on the same day as me. If we looked hard enough, we would doubtless find many more cases of this kind.

And it was also my grandmother who enlightened me about why so many of the Jewish children that I knew, especially Andor Friedmann, looked so sad: Ilona Kandó, who inherited a fairly large library¹¹⁸ from her father, the master barber Sándor Kandó (who had once even visited Bosnia), and who as a “lady of Szinérváralja” read a great deal, once pressed into my hands a fairly thick book bound in black and entitled *Death Factory*, whose author I do not recall¹¹⁹ but the contents of which have remained etched in my memory. All the more so because it was from this volume that she would read nightly to our grandfather, who as the result of a botched eye-operation could only make out block capitals. So, with my younger brother Pali, we listened horror-struck – our shared “chaise-longue” being in the same bedroom – to the systematic accounts of the horrific events. (Now, reading over what I have written, I suddenly recall that my grandmother once told of a highly intelligent Jewish intellectual who, probably in the early 1920s, but perhaps a few years later, gave a lecture to a small circle on “Communism” and “Zionism”. Unfortunately, I cannot recall whether she had been in the audience or had

¹¹⁸ This included, apart from the collected poems of Sándor Petőfi, Endre Ady and Attila József, and many of the works of the novelists Mór Jókai and Kálmán Mikszáth, and also Ferenc Herczeg’s novel *Pogányok* [Pagans], as well as a beautifully illustrated “Rákóczi Album”, the geographical and historical atlases of Manó and Károly Kogutowicz, and the first edition (1908–1912) of Tolnai’s ten-volume *History of the World*, and also Benedek Barátosi Balogh’s ethnographic work *Séta a világ körül* [A Stroll Around the World], illustrated with striking photographs and drawings. (As this came out from the same publisher and had a similar cover, until very recently I wrongly thought it was a sort of supplementary volume, not an independent work. This may well have happened because in the stressful rush of our move to Hungary on 10 July 1962, we stuffed our modest belongings into two hurriedly knocked together wooden crates and had no room for even a single one of the books Sándor and Ilona Kandó had amassed. These were carried off by those of our relatives who remained in Romania.) I would mention, in passing, that without my voracious reading in that library between 1956 and 1962 I could hardly have become a historian.

¹¹⁹ Tamás Gusztáv Filep has suggested the volume was the third edition of Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka’s *Halálgyár* [Death Factory], translated by László Balassa, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1958, a bestseller in its time. My thanks to him for this highly plausible suggestion.

merely heard about it, and of course I no longer know whether she actually mentioned a name at all.)

There are, of course, a few other fragments of memory as well: in the early and mid-1950s it would sometimes happen that in a tenement mainly inhabited by Jews, families and friends would gather and on such occasions music could be heard late into the night, and there would be talk of the various deals that were being made, there was perhaps dancing, too, – at all events, there was a lot of noise. My grandfather would comment: “There they go, *deydeying* again!” This was an expression I had not heard before, nor have I since, and perhaps the reason I remember it is that (perhaps wrongly) it conjures up for me the atmosphere of the Polish small-town shtetls,¹²⁰ the ghettos whence the ancestors of Szinérválja’s Jews, too, had come some two centuries before, perhaps even earlier in the case of some families.¹²¹ On the whole, derogatory remarks were rarely made in front of us children:¹²² though “seftelés” (wheeling and dealing) had a certain negative connotation, it also implied, at least as much, appreciation of the dynamism of “the Jews”, in the same way as Father regularly referred to some of his childhood friends as “big *machers*”.¹²³ The only somewhat contemptuous remark I heard when I was small was

¹²⁰ I discovered recently that one of the most beautiful and most popular songs of the Pesach seder-night is “Dayenu”, which means something like “even this much would suffice us”. This is a song that is sung by young and old together. The refrain is “dayenu” which is repeated in approximately the form “day-day-enu, day-day-enu, dayenu, dayenu”. Since the seder supper takes places strictly after sunset, this song is sung by the whole family late in the evening/early in the night. In the night-time silence, the text could naturally be heard from the Jewish houses. See the first song at www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtLKOCfwct4 (The whole album can be accessed at www.youtube.com/playlist?list) Once again my thanks to József Nagy for these details.

¹²¹ Anderco et al. (2015): op. cit. 45.

¹²² I recall only one: my grandmother, when she wanted to say something nasty about one of her Jewish (female) friends sometimes the word “rűfke” (prostitute, slut, “easy” woman) would slip out, but I am not aware of her ever being at odds with any of them. The other piece of folk wisdom that was in wide circulation among the Hungarians of Szinérválja was that the Jews are generally intelligent and quick-witted but when – very rarely – they are stupid, they are *very* stupid indeed.

¹²³ I think that the above-mentioned Kepes anecdote, which I heard in a variety of forms from family and friends, should be considered in the same light, especially as my grandfather Kálmán’s barber shop could not have been located far from the famous clothier’s destroyed by fire. On the other hand, another sliver of memory, also about my father, is somewhat at odds with this: one of my father’s childhood Jewish pals, with whom he remained on intimate terms even in adulthood, and whose name I have unfortunately forgotten, was the *sole* survivor of the death camp at Auschwitz, as every member of his family and virtually all his relatives went “up in the smoke [i.e. of the gas chambers – *trans*.]”. My father, a little naively but honestly asked him: “Why did you come back?” His reply: “I will move to Israel for ever, but first I will have my revenge on the Fascists!” (He was probably the same person who, according to another anecdote, already as a member of the Romanian Communist Party sitting beside a Soviet officer at an identity check, signalled the “problem” cases by stepping on the officer’s toes under the table.) The father of Imre Tóth (Szatmárnémeti, 1921 – Paris, 2010), who spent his childhood in Szatmár, went to university in Kolozsvár, had a teaching career that began in Bucharest and ended in Regensburg and called himself, modestly, “a historian of

that *after 1920* almost every Jewish family made its children go to a Romanian school. The local Hungarians wrongly interpreted this as an intention to distance themselves and cut themselves off from the community.¹²⁴ But this was less damning than in the case of those families which, as happened with several of my classmates in 1959, had their children transferred to Romanian schools from grade 5.

For me it was especially poignant when in the early 1920s the Inczes, too, moved into the Jewish quarter's Vasút (formerly Árpád) Street, close by the synagogue but facing it, nearer to the main square.¹²⁵

János Incze recalls the following Jewish families in Szinerválja (pointing out that Jews were, in fact, thin on the ground): Ickovits, Katz, Lebovits, Rapaport, Zimmel, and he also notes the name of the owner of the famous alcohol manufactory in Szinerválja, Lébus Klein, as well as painting a sympathetic portrait of the scholarly Jewish teacher of the *cheder*,¹²⁶ “Mr Groszmann”. Of his childhood playmates who were Jewish he lists Hersu Ickovits, Samu Grósz, Majsi Izsák and Icíg Lóvi.¹²⁷

mathematics”, was – still under his original name Róth – one of the K.u.K. army’s most outstanding horse-cavalrymen and the reward for his services was the same as the other 600,000 or so Hungarian Jews: “[...] It was my father who had the most profound and lasting influence on me. My father was a Cabalist. He went up in the smoke of the gas chambers. He lies here, buried in me. An open wound, eternally aflame. Nor do I want it to ever heal.” See Gyula Staa’s interview with Imre Tóth in: Imre Tóth: *Isten és geometria* [God and Geometry]. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2000. 452.

¹²⁴ Unfortunately, this did in fact happen, but only *after* the Shoah. That is, this was a(nother) case of the post-1920, faltering and increasingly insecure, Hungarian (national) identity confusing cause and effect. See on this the views of Mihály Vajda: *Mentalitások* [Mentalities]. *Élet és Irodalom*, 2 February 2018. 5.

¹²⁵ In my memory, however, it was *not* this house that was the Inczes’ home. That was the nursery, on the banks of the Szinyér river, of Sándor Incze, who was about the same age as my father and one of the three children of his father János Incze’s second marriage. This was probably located on an older property of one of the branches of the family. My parents were also on good terms with the two other siblings, Feri and Manci, and had obviously heard of János, who as Ioan Incze-Dej became a distinguished historian of Romanian art, though I came across him only during my time as Cultural Counsellor in Bucharest (25 October 1990 – 15 June 1995). His above-mentioned autobiography I found only as I was sorting out the library of my father, who died in December 2000, so the first time I was first able to make use of the valuable information about him was in the notes to my Christmas 1993 interview with Béla Bíró (see above).

¹²⁶ *Cheder* (originally meaning ‘room’): a primary school “where the little ones learn the basics of Judaism (reading and writing Hebrew, the Scriptures, and the fundamentals of the Jewish religion)”. See Kiss (2014): op. cit. 79.

¹²⁷ Incze (1982): op. cit.



The synagogue, built in 1904, as it looks today

We lived close by the synagogue, only a couple of houses down on the left-hand side, and our next-door-but-one neighbour was the Laufel(d) family, which had ended up there from Bukovina after World War II and therefore did not speak Hungarian: the long-bearded, hard-hatted shochet, his wig-wearing wife, who cut her nails severely every Friday as ritual demanded, had a couple of always-smiling children roughly our age: a girl Ruhi and a son Bertalan ('Berci'),¹²⁸ my brother Pali's best friend: they communicated in a mixture of Hungarian and Romanian. As a result neither learnt the other's mother tongue, though for my part, I spoke only Romanian with them. In retrospect I think I can be proud that the extremely kind-hearted old Laufel, who reminded me of the rulers of ancient Assyria and always wore ritual garb, frequently called me into his study and tried to induct me into the secrets of the Talmud, knowing that, unlike his son, I was a bookworm. In time we became truly "shabbat goyim" to the family: it was my brother and I who would lug their household pots and pans up to the attic before the high days and holidays, and it was also my duty from time to time to take the russet-coloured wig of the virtually bald mistress of the house to the hairdresser's in the main square. Looking back I cannot say for certain who else of their fellow Jews in the town were observant (the parents' and grandparents' generation surely were, but fewer of those of our age, but it is certain that, at least on paper, they were all Orthodox.) This is suggested, too, by a scene that my brother Pali has shared with me: he cannot have been more than six or seven years old when, on his way home alone, he was stopped in front of the synagogue by two bearded, sidelock-wearing Jews, who asked him to accompany them into the building and, once inside, lifted him up so he could switch the lights back on at the fusebox. (That reminds me, this often happened at the shochet's, too: we would be the ones to switch the lights back on *post festa*.)

¹²⁸ The father's deep bass as he summoned his children: "Ruhele!", "Boabi", or "Bericu!" still rings in my ears to this day.

Also in our street, called Árpád Street in “Hungarian times”, later Vasút (Railway) Street and even later re-named Strada Cuza Voda, there lived several more Jewish–Hungarian (Hungarian–Jewish) families: three families called Friedmann, all related, with their children Ervin, “Baburi” and Andor, and old Szender Friedmann, the tanner.

A little farther on, closer to the railway station, lived the Farkases, and opposite them the Judovicses, with (again) sons roughly our age. The older one, stocky, pleasant-faced, glasses-wearing, and with sticky-out ears, was nicknamed Cuni and became a physician in Kolozsvár, while his younger brother, whose name time has erased from my memory, allegedly had his tumultuous life as Jerusalem’s chief of police cut short by a heart attack though he was not yet fifty years old. Sadly I know no more about them, but I have a faint memory connected to them which reveals something about how even in our childhood the complications of Romanian–Hungarian coexistence took their toll, however much we would like to think that – with distance lending enchantment to the view – back in those days they were idyllic. Concretely I seem to recall that once, in 1958 or 1959, the children of Vasút Street and Balta Street¹²⁹ clashed along national/minority lines. Of course, the fracas was far from bloody or even serious, but there was a slap or two here and there and some kicks in the rear, while the verbal abuse that was heard is barely printable.¹³⁰ In retrospect I also see it as symbolic that Magyars and Hungarian Jews ended up in the same “camp”, even if the Jewish kids did indeed have justifiable reservations about us innocent heirs of the discredited Hungarian state that was formerly in charge. The “headquarters” were at the Judovicses. That was the first and last time I visited them. In fact, it was not common for Jews and non-Jews to get together, and apart from them and, of course, the shochet and his family, my brother Pali and I saw only one of the Friedmann families at all regularly, though to them we did go quite often. So much so that the powerful smell of the garlic that they were fond of using in their kitchen has for ever lodged in my nose.¹³¹ The following story, also shared with me by Pali, is also connected: he was good friends not only with Berci Laufel but also with Baburi Friedmann, which is noteworthy because apart from the regular afternoon football matches played with the rubber ball,¹³² there were not many things that brought them together, as Pali did not go to Romanian kindergarten before, while the Jewish children, as I have mentioned, all completed their studies in Romanian schools. There was, however, a very strong natural affinity between

¹²⁹ Now Str. Crișan (Anderco et al. [2015]: op. cit. 155.)

¹³⁰ *Ungur-pungur țapă-n cur – le paharul de la cur – Și apoi zi: ce tare bun!* [I am a Jew – I don’t deny it – To you I’ll give everything I sh*t!] etc. (My brother Pali and Márton Szmuck also recall such street fights and, unfortunately, I too can remember one in the school playground in the spring of 1960, when I had to rescue a Romanian lad from the clutches of my classmate Sanyi Nagy.)

¹³¹ This is somewhat significant because in September of 1968 it proved to be a decisive olfactory link in the chain of the extended process whereby – in a kind of ‘aha moment’ – I was ultimately able to identify where some of the new friends I made in Budapest hailed from. Often they could not have been aware of this, and it was unseemly to raise the matter.

¹³² I still remember how much this cost: 3 lei, 75 bani, for which we saved up with my brother in dribs and drabs.

them, because as youngsters they spent so much of their free time together and it was not only with their Romanian coevals that they fell out: they often fought among themselves, too. In the course of one of these afternoon clashes Pali slapped the sidelock-sporting Baburi, who always had his head covered, and even managed to knock his cap off. He must have sensed that he had made a big mistake and had no little remorse because he slunk after Baburi under cover of darkness to overhear the mortally offended boy report the incident to his mother. Pali was shocked by the response of the mother, who wore the prescribed wig: “May whoever who does such a thing burn in the flames!” Fortunately the matter had no serious consequences and their relationship was unaffected, but Pali remembered all his life that it is not advisable to offend against either Jewish customs or the Jews’ thousand-year-old sensitivities. Particularly if the arm of the one “passing judgement” (and her husband) is adorned with the bluish “Auschwitz numbers”. I have not, unlike my brother, retained this memory, probably as a kind of “self-defensive” gesture, yet it is scarcely credible that I did not also see these tattoos.

I well remember the Steinbergers, too, who lived on the corner of Vasút and Balta Streets and whose blond, blue-eyed son Jóska, a year or eighteen months my senior, became an internationally renowned professor of ecology at Tel Aviv’s Bar Ilan University.¹³³ I seem to recall that he owned a “proper” football, sewn of black patches of leather, thus ensuring for himself a regular place on any *ad hoc* team playing a match on the other “pitch”, in the dried-up bed of the stream in tiny Balta Street.

In the opposite direction, towards the main square, lived another Friedmann family, whose son Andor, roughly my age, has remained lodged deep in my memory because of his big brown, melancholy eyes, as mentioned above.

In the next house along, on the same side, lived “Majsi” Izsák, the baker, with his wife and two daughters. The head of the family must have been very fond of my father, because when in January 1958, he was sacked from his post as head of the Hungarian school for “chauvinist-nationalistic tendencies” and we had literally nothing to eat, Majsi would surprise us, unbidden, every two or three days with a “brown loaf”. (He would discreetly raid his allocation of dough and have the loaf sent over with one of his daughters after dark. When, almost half a century later, in the summer of 2008, we met in Tel Aviv, one of the girls, by then an elderly lady, told me of the recurring dream she had, which has provided the motto for this piece.)

Another noble act from those difficult times has also been preserved by my brother Pali: between January 1958 and the end of 1960, my father could not find a job as no one was willing to take him on, and he would occasionally lay down railway sleepers at the station to make some money. Thus my mother became the principal support of our family of seven, as she was not thrown out of her job in the Romanian school system. From her modest teacher’s salary she once bought a scrawny chicken at the market so my grandmother could make some thin chicken soup, and she was carrying it home triumphantly in her bag. On the way she ran into the wife of one of my father’s childhood Jewish friends trudging with a sad face back to the shochet in the direction of the main

¹³³ Prof. Yosef Steinberger. <https://life-sciences.biu.ac.il/en/node/609>.

square. They started talking and it turned out that the fat capon she was carrying from the shochet was, after all, “treif”. The kind-hearted woman said: “I tell you what, let’s swap!” And that is how, just once, we managed to have a filling meal, with Ilona Kandó improvising a splendid lunch (or maybe dinner) out of the generous gift.

By the by, it was from Majsi Izsák that my father discovered that the much-touted emigration to Palestine was not all it was cracked up to be: Majsi’s testicles were beaten¹³⁴ by the Securitate in Nagybánya until he revealed where in his garden he had buried the iron casket containing what little he had managed to salvage of his assets through the Shoah. So he began his new life in the Promised Land around 1960 without a penny to his name, aged over 50.¹³⁵

In the main square stood the lodging house of the former clothes dealers, the Neumanns, with its spacious courtyard: this served as Szinérváralja’s main football pitch and was the scene every summer of matches “to the death” from early afternoon late into the night, with a mix of Hungarians, Magyarised Swabians (ethnic Germans) from Szatmár, Jews and Romanians. Here only one thing mattered: skill with the ball. Among those who used to participate were the two sidelock-wearing Neumann boys. Jaszi, the older of the two, who had Péter Esterházy’s looks,¹³⁶ was really good: I heard he later became a banker or wholesaler in New York, but that may be just a rumour and he too may be living in Israel. I do not know how they were related to “Öcsi” Neumann, five or six years my senior, who was one of the most talented football-players in Szinérváralja,¹³⁷ and after he emigrated – or so I heard – he even played a few times for the Israeli national team, though this may of course be just a fairytale. And if I add to this that in the academic year 1954–1955 my parents enrolled me in the Romanian kindergarten, where several Hungarian–Jewish (Jewish–Hungarian) families fortunate enough to survive the Holocaust also enrolled their offspring, then I can record without the slightest exaggeration that meeting and playing and, in general, spending time with

¹³⁴ My brother remembers it as him having had weights hung on him, but it makes little difference: he was tortured. Sándor, who must have been four or five years old at the time, and therefore still slept in my parents’ bedroom, overheard what my father whispered to my mother about this. After reading the first draft of this piece he wrote in an e-mail to me on 7 July 2019, *inter alia*: “Jews would be tortured by having a typewriter hung from their penis and being forced to walk around carrying it. Father whispered this to Mother. That’s how I remember it”.

¹³⁵ Fortunately there were many cases when traditional Jewish resourcefulness and astuteness triumphed over the Romanian Securitate system: one of his Jewish friends told my father, laughing, that many of those on Aliyah managed to spirit their family silver and gold out of the country by placing them in small packets sewn into the back passages of exported cattle by veterinary surgeons they had bribed in the Temesvár and Arad areas. The animals were then herded out west, or onto boats headed straight for Israel, where local members of the network were ready and waiting to pick out the specially-tagged creatures.

¹³⁶ See further Borsi-Kálmán (2018): *op. cit.* 165–226 (especially 215–216).

¹³⁷ A favourite of my father’s, who as a player and trainer picked him around 1957–1958 as a youngster several times to play for the juniors of the Romanian third league team, Unirea Seini (Szinérváralja United).

Jews was a wholly natural, habitual thing to do, an organic part of our everyday life. My fellows included, in addition to Józsi Steinberger and Jaszi Neumann, Ervin Izsák, whom I met again some forty years later when I was a diplomat in Bucharest, where he headed the local office of the Jewish Agency, as well as Szuri, the child of the Schwarzes, who were related to Pál Szende¹³⁸ (Szuri, with her shoulder-length, raven-black hair, was one of the most beautiful Jewish girls I have ever seen), as well as, among others, the charming, slightly built daughter of the Holländers, who were sent to the institution by their parents for the same reason as I, namely to learn the state language as well as possible. But it was not just on the football-pitch that I would meet on a daily basis the children as well as the parents of Jewish families other than those listed earlier, among them Steinmetz, the other Jewish baker in the main square, Hersku and the Markovitses, as well as the Kellers. Mrs Keller, née Judit Bogáti, originally from Budapest, taught mathematics in my father's school until the 1959 "forced merger" of the Hungarian and Romanian schools. The Kellers' son, Ferenc, some five or six years younger than us, subsequently also completed his medical studies in Kolozsvár, becoming a well-regarded urologist with an andrological practice in the land of his birth, too. Other names include Weiner (a mechanic at the power station opposite the yeast factory: it was in the Weiners' yard that I saw the dream of every boy in Szinérváralja, a big toy car you could climb into, a present from America), Berger¹³⁹ (the dentist), Dr Bíró¹⁴⁰ (the internist), whose daughter Zsuzsi was his spitting image and also attended the Romanian kindergarten. I found out only later that Zoltán Zelkovics, who hailed from Szatmár and is known in the Hungarian literary world as Zoltán Zelk (1906–1981), spent a lot of time with his Szinérváralja relatives in his youth,¹⁴¹ and wrote several poems mentioning Szinérváralja. And also here was born Miklós Nagy-Talavera,¹⁴² the noted historian, later of San Francisco, whose father had earlier acquired a patent of nobility, as well as – lastly – one of the grandfathers of London-based historian and cartographer András Bereznay.¹⁴³

I met Miklós Nagy-Talavera numerous times, both in Bucharest and Paris. He was especially proud that his family was not of Ashkenazi but of Sephardic origin. He had quite a spectacular career: not only did he survive Auschwitz as an adolescent, but he was "fortunate" enough to work, between 1949 and 1955, on the Trans-Siberian railway, in

¹³⁸ Pál Szende (né Schwarz) (Nyírbátor, 7 February 1879 – Szinérváralja, 15 July 1934), writer on economics, radical politician, Minister of Finance in Mihály Károlyi's government 1918–1919 as well as in the Berinkey Administration that followed it.

¹³⁹ Móric Berger (Nagysomkút/Şomcuta Mare, 9 April 1914 – Ashdod, Israel, 18 February 1972). Anderco et al. (2015): op. cit. 47.

¹⁴⁰ Dr Mátyás Bíró (Bethlen/Beclean, 11 April 1979 – Ashkelon, Israel, 17 July 2004). Ibid. 48.

¹⁴¹ His mother was born Mária Herskovits. (NB There were several families called Herskovits in Szinérváralja.)

¹⁴² Miklós Nagy-Talavera (Budapest, 1 February 1929 – Chico, California, 23 January 2000).

¹⁴³ András Bereznay's maternal grandfather was called Imre Ignác Szemere. He had a tailor's shop in Budapest, Ullmann and Szemere. His wife – András Bereznay's grandmother – was called Lujza Ullmann. (I am grateful to András Bereznay for these details.)

the company of Ukrainian smugglers and Russian political prisoners. Thus, in addition to Hungarian, his mother tongue, he learnt (in primary school in Nagyvárad) Romanian, at university in Vienna he picked up German, and he also spoke excellent Ukrainian and Russian. His English-language publications on *Nicolae Iorga, the Iron Guard*, and a comparison of Hungarian and Romanian fascism¹⁴⁴ are acknowledged as standard works worldwide, just as are the historical atlases of András Bereznay.¹⁴⁵

And last but not least, an uplifting memory: one of my father's best friends was old Ernő Rosenberg, who after learning the profession of tailoring and cutting in Budapest at the beginning of the 1930s returned to Szinérváralja. He was both a gentleman's tailor and a financial patron of football. He had plenty of business *nous*, as he worked not only for the "gentlemen" of the old world but also for the Romanian day-labourers of the local Avas region (the "vasánys" as we used to call them), who would come in droves to the traditional weekly Thursday market. He was able to make the traditional Hungarian *szűrs* and *subas*, the full-length shepherd's cloaks of felt and sheepskin, supplying them with useful pockets in which he craftily hid 10-lei banknotes: these the client would find in the changing rooms and would therefore immediately buy the item without bothering to haggle. No wonder customers flocked to Rosenberg Outfitters! Stocky and podgy Uncle Ernő resembled more the Hungarian gentry than a Jewish burgher and enjoyed the good life, having a fine old time with gipsy bands in the legendary local restaurant, the Korona. And, of course, he was there at every football match and even accompanied the team on their away matches. The friendship was doubtless reinforced by the fact that, as I have already mentioned, my father was one of the best football players in the area, in 1943 even being recruited for the Transylvanian army team and by no less a person than his occasional sparring partner and a stalwart of the Budapest team Honvéd, Sándor Balogh II, who was later (just before the Puskás period) to captain the Hungarian national team. Fortunately, uncle Ernő, unlike many of his fellows, managed to avoid labour service and emigrated to Beer Sheva in Israel at the end of the 1950s, though he frequently came back to visit. On one of these trips, having discovered that his best friend's son was a diplomat in Bucharest, he looked me up in the Romanian capital.

It was summer, so he invited me to have dinner with him in an elegant outdoor restaurant somewhere near the Piața Aviatorilor in one of Bucharest's villa quarters, and asked point blank:

"Do you know who your father was?"

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas Nagy-Talavera: *The Green Shirts and the Others. A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania*. Las Vegas, Center for Romanian Studies, 2001; *Nicholas Nagy-Talavera: Nicolae Iorga: A Biography*. Las Vegas, Center for Romanian Studies, 2008.

¹⁴⁵ András Bereznay: *The Times Atlas of European History*. London, Times Books, 1994; András Bereznay: *Kings and Queens of the British Isles*. London, Times Books, 2002. (He made the maps for both books.) See also András Bereznay: *Erdély történetének atlasza* [Atlas of Transylvanian History]. Budapest, Méry Ratio Kiadó, 2011; András Bereznay: *A cigányság történetének atlasza – Térképezett romatörténelem* [A Historical Atlas of the Roma – Roma History in Maps]. Budapest, Méry Ratio Kiadó, 2018.

I looked at him in some surprise, whereupon he said:

“Let me tell you that he served for a time under Colonel Imre Reviczky in Nagybánya and helped countless Jews to survive and to retain their assets!”¹⁴⁶

I was stunned but, of course, proud, for my father had never said a single word about what he had done in the war nor about the circumstances of our much later resettlement,¹⁴⁷ though if Ernő Rosenberg is to be believed, he had nothing to be ashamed of. All I knew from my grandmother was that until he was taken prisoner by the English, he served first in Kolozsvár and then, indeed, in Nagybánya as a commissioned officer, and another of his friends once suggested that it was perhaps in some defensive role.

But that is all. My mother had said nothing more, perhaps even she knew little, as they had only met in Szatmár at the end of 1946. In other words, *omertà* reigned supreme not only among the Jewish families that survived¹⁴⁸ but everyone else living in that dangerous world turned upside-down.

Postscript

I began by saying that I had bitten off more than I could chew and that my chances of success were minimal. Nevertheless, I have tried to get to the bottom of a few things

¹⁴⁶ He may not in fact have mentioned the name of his boss and the truth is that – perhaps out of modesty – I did not chase up myself how much truth there was in Ernő Rosenberg’s claim. Perhaps one day I will look up István Deák’s article, *Tisztesség és becsület a II. világháborúban* [Honour and decency in World War II]. *História*, 32. (2010), 8. 12–18, and Ádám Reviczky’s *Vesztesháborúk – megnyert csaták – Emlékezés Reviczky Imre ezredesre* [Wars Lost – Battles Won – Colonel Imre Reviczky in Memoriam]. Budapest, Magvető, 1985, but there is probably no written record of this, as it could have been a private endeavour which it is indeed best to keep quiet about. But it is a fact that after he returned from being a prisoner of war he was not summoned before the political screening committee, I suspect because his Jewish friends intervened.

¹⁴⁷ Quizzing them about this much later I know only that after being rejected twice, at the third attempt we received permission to leave in late May or early June of 1962, the trail for obtaining this permission leading back to Lajos Cseterki (1921–1983), secretary to the Presidential Council, who was my father’s classmate in the Bethlen Kollégium – as were István Ercse, head of the Sashegy János Arany school for children in state care, and József Méhes (1920–2009), formerly head of the Institute for the Blind.

¹⁴⁸ On this topic my contemporary Péter Gárdos (b. Budapest, 8 June 1948) had this to say in an interview: “For fifty years my parents said nothing about what happened before 1945 – in fact, for a long time I didn’t even know I was Jewish. I faced up to this properly only in adulthood. To this day I find it difficult to explain why my father, Miklós Gárdos, a gifted journalist, didn’t set down on paper his experiences while he could. As he didn’t, the reckoning was left to us, the next generation. It was a heavy burden we carried on our backs for years, even decades”. See Péter Kövesdi’s interview with Péter Gárdos: *Secrets poison the soul. Vasárnapi Hírek*, 3 November 2018. 19.

because a couple of factors did, after all, make the undertaking easier, or at least partly possible:

- a) I did spend all of the first, and most impressionable, twelve years of my life, those between 1948 and 1960, in the Jewish quarter of Szinérváralja.
- b) The study of history (i.e. researching the past) has become my chief occupation, which is to say that it was my professional duty to put my memories into some kind of order. In addition, *en route* as it were, I had gradually to realise that these, at first sight unconnected, facts were in my case inextricably intertwined: not only the Romanian majority but, equally, the Hungarian Jewish minority of Szinérváralja have impressed themselves ineradicably on my consciousness and have, indeed, become embedded in my personality. This basic situation was further nuanced by the fact that the (for the most part) root-and-branch Calvinists of Szinérváralja, were only relatively in a majority over the Magyarised Catholics of Armenian,¹⁴⁹ Zipser (ethnic Germans from the Slovak area), “Danube Swabian” (ethnic German),¹⁵⁰ Polish,¹⁵¹ Slovene or Croat¹⁵² and Czech¹⁵³ origin, especially in the Jewish quarter, where of course those of Jewish faith continued to live in relatively greatest numbers and which, if only because of its synagogue and the ritual baths in Gyár Street, retained its Jewish character. This was thus a way of life, a multiple minority situation, that accompanies the individual socialised in this milieu all through his life, wherever fate should later happen to cast him.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Csergezán, Kamenszki, Patován. (There was also a family called Ciprisz, presumably neo-Greek or perhaps Macedo-Romanian in origin, like the family by the name of Țințaș.)

¹⁵⁰ Jakner, Kretzinger, Simf, Tefenhardt, Stauder, Zeispergel, (cf. Incze [1982]: op. cit. 38). Between 1955 and 1960 I had classmates and teachers called Groszhardt (Józsi and Matyi), Hölzli (Erzsi and Jani), Ulmann (István), Schönplflug (Zoli), Schmutzer, Printzinger (Ferenc), Ébersz (Pál) and Wendlinger (Mária), and one neighbour was Uncle Jóska Stempel. But I also well remember the Nágels and the Starmüllers.

¹⁵¹ Brezovszky, Kmiatek, Netoleczky, Radvánszky and so forth.

¹⁵² Habarics, Morecz (?).

¹⁵³ Konyicska, Smillár, Tomanek, Vavrek.

¹⁵⁴ “The Transylvanian [Partium] Hungarians have one relationship to the Romanian majority in Romania and another to Hungary proper, where Hungarians are in the (overwhelming) majority. And they want to remain different, that is to say Hungarian, not only *vis-à-vis* the majority Romanians but also insist that the Hungarians of Transylvania [Partium] differ from the Hungarians of Hungary proper: in other words, it wants to remain a minority *vis-à-vis* its own majority nation, as well. *Thus, nothing can be said that is not formulated in terms of minority–majority* [...]. Every comparison points towards the minority because it is only and always particles that resemble each other.” Géza Páskándi: A kiválasztott és az alkalmas [The Chosen and the Suitable]. In Judit Havas – Gabriella Lengyel (eds.): *Párbeszélgetés. Írók, költők a Károlyi-palotában* [Conversations à Deux. Writers and Poets in the Károlyi Palace]. Budapest, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum – Kortárs – Dinasztia, 2000. 73. (My emphasis.)

This is indeed what happened to me, because although for a long time I did not ascribe any particular importance to my early experiences with the Jews of Szinérváralja, or indeed with Jews in general, after our move to Hungary in 1962, first as a student at Sárospatak (1962–1965) and then as an undergraduate in the Arts Faculty of Budapest University and a member of the Eötvös Collegium (1968–1973), I had countless experiences that I was able to “interpret” solely and exclusively thanks to the “imprinting” I had in my Szinérváralja childhood. By this I do not, of course, mean to suggest that I carried some kind of holy grail in my knapsack, but rather that after much reflection on the topic I gradually came to realise that, subconsciously or unconsciously, I had acquired extraordinarily valuable life experiences in my boyhood, the systematic processing of which could help me understand a number of interconnections, of whose existence the overwhelming majority of my Hungarian coevals (including many of those of Jewish background) – through no fault of their own, since they were taboo topics – could not be aware. In the absence of such handles on it, even the most intelligent of them could obtain only with a great deal of effort – from specialist books, bulky monographs, and dusty archives – the kind and volume of knowledge and the conceptual framework involved, that was, as one might put it, handed to me on a plate by Fate, and without which it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to orient oneself amidst the various nooks and crannies of Hungarian societal development and social psychology, topics which continue to remain highly sensitive both at the emotional and at the political level. And even if they should somehow manage to do this (and there is no reason why they should not), it remains questionable whether, behind the *termini technici*, there is genuine, personally lived-through, and sometimes suffered-through, practical experience.

In retrospect it seems very likely that it was on the basis of these childhood and adolescent memories that I kneaded together, between 1962 and 1970, in the depths of my consciousness, my “ideal” Jewish personae which, though far from perfect, helped me greatly to orient myself and to shape my typological sensibility: they ensured a relatively secure point of departure, despite the fact that I knew almost nothing at the time about the stages and hidden hierarchies in the evolution of Hungarian society, the formation of the middle class and of the nation, the time-depths involved, and the internal system of prejudices that everywhere reached far down into the depths.¹⁵⁵

And here I must return to one of my fundamental experiences in Hungary: neither during the years spent in Sárospatak (1962 to 1965), nor around 1968–1970 in the Arts

¹⁵⁵ “The [...] (Hungarian) social class system not only does not strive for neutrality of values but on the contrary must gain the validity of the categories of its estates, and subsequently of the quasi-estate, middle-class categories, as well as the justification for individuals’ standing, on a different level, in the form of qualification [...]. To both sides of the pervasive divide [in the evolution of Hungarian society and in public thinking] and to every kind of societal division, to every means of bettering oneself in society, qualitative concepts were attached, which manifested themselves in the way the groups treated each other and in the forms of contact.” Zoltán Tóth: A rendi norma és a „keresztyén polgárisodás”. Társadalomtörténeti esszé. [The Norm of the Estates and ‘Christian Embourgeoisement’. An Essay on Social History]. *Századvég*, (1991), 2–3. 69–91.

Faculty in Budapest, did it, for a long time, dawn on me *why* many strict, one might even say diehard, members of the Budapest socialist *nomenklatura*, young people enrolled in the Lajos Kossuth College for Boys, who preserved the values of the Calvinist world of the 1930s – and later my fellow students in their early twenties in the capital – *sought my company*, in particular? Whereas they could have taken their pick of children of intellectual families from the countryside, or even from “genteel” families that had slipped down the ladder.

Because that was how I saw them, as genteel Hungarian boys and girls from Budapest, for with one or two exceptions, they all had Magyar names and apart from their clothing being somewhat better quality than ours, they differed from us not in the slightest, unless perhaps in that they (though not all of them) *seemed* to be a little more self-assured and were less afraid of our strict teachers than were we.¹⁵⁶ Though already in Sárospatak it did begin to dawn on me that I seemed to know them better than did my fellows – but the nature of this instinctive knowledge did not become clear even to myself for a long time, and it never occurred to me that the attraction might be reciprocated (that is to say, that they felt that the more than averagely sensitive character that I brought with me from my previous *minority existence* might be closely related to theirs). To say nothing of the fact that many of them, by chance, as it were, experienced with a shock so much the greater the true state of affairs,¹⁵⁷ which has by now spawned a library of specialist literature.

It was equally curious that, wherever in the course of my wanderings in the outside world (London, Amsterdam, Bucharest, Vancouver, New York, Paris) I happened to sit down alone in a café or pub, I would invariably be approached and asked in the course of the conversations, whatever the language, whether I did not, by any chance, happen to be Jewish?¹⁵⁸ Because my interlocutors would invariably turn out to be descendants of Jews who had emigrated from Central and Eastern Europe.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Borsi-Kálmán (2002): op. cit. 229, 232–233, 261.

¹⁵⁷ The associated questions of ethics and identity – which subsequently inevitably affect ways of life, group formation, choice of life partner, etc. – were formulated at age 30, just at the high point of the “regime change” in 1989, by an author a little younger than “the great generation”, in an important if little-cited essay, which may be summed up thus: “Is it possible to regard someone as a Jew, *is it possible to expect* him to regard himself as a Jew, if in his most impressionable years it never occurred to him that he was a Jew, and it was only from one day to the next that he was informed, or realized, that he was a Jew, that is to say that he was unexpectedly landed with a burden he had had no connection with in his upbringing: *is it conceivable* that such a person (whether an adult or, as is more common, a child) can acquire a Jewish identity overnight, that he can develop a complete Jewish identity (without, subsequently, having to pay a price), and that that identity becomes an organic part of his whole consciousness?” László Márton: *Kiválasztottak és elvegyülők* [The Chosen and the Blenders]. Budapest, Magvető Kiadó, 1989. 24–25. (Emphases in the original.) The present author fully identifies with Márton’s diplomatic answer to this question: “I leave the response to the reader”. Ibid. 25.

¹⁵⁸ I once experienced this myself, even in the Eötvös Collegium, in the early autumn of 1968. See further Borsi-Kálmán (2002): op. cit. 263; Borsi-Kálmán (2018): op. cit. 167.

In conclusion: my *partially* “quasi-Jewish” socialisation in the Jewish quarter of Szinérváralja in another, some half-century old, historical time was felt by those of my coevals in Hungary (especially in Budapest) who had become detached from their Jewish roots, or who had consciously kept their distance from them, to be intuitively “quasi-Jewish”, even if – like me – they could not really have been aware of its nature and possible outcome. In other words, it was a matter of the fortunate coalescence of a “secondary Jewish identity”¹⁵⁹ from two kinds of origin and different motivations.

And this probably remains the case to this day.¹⁶⁰

Epilogue

In the catacombs of the Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem, which preserve a complete record of the Central European Jewish communities destroyed during World War II, the most striking stele happens to be that of the Jews of Szinérváralja, a fact which should be interpreted as an elegiac memorial to the scintillating quondam communal – and increasingly middle-class – life of the Hungarian Jews of Szinérváralja

¹⁵⁹ For my part, as some kind of summing up, I am inclined to identify this very complex identity-seeking/identity clarifying *process* as a kind of “secondary Jewish identity”. I have tried to summarise my views on this topic in: *Töredék. Töprengés a honi antiszemitizmus természetéről, avagy óvatos javallatok a magyar–magyar viszony rendezésére* [Fragment. Reflections on the nature of anti-Semitism in Hungary, or cautious proposals for dealing with the Hungarian–Hungarian relationship], a volume of 324 pages currently accessible as an e-book on the website of the [National Széchényi Library](#) and the [István Bibó Intellectual Workshop](#). An expanded version: Borsi-Kálmán (2014): op. cit.; see also Béla Borsi-Kálmán et al. (eds.): *Homályzónák/Zones d’ombre. Felvilágosodás és liberalizmus/Lumières et libéralisme. Tanulmányok Kecskeméti Károly 80. születésnapjára* [Mélanges offerts à Charles Kecskeméti pour son 80eanniversaire]. Budapest, Kortárs Kiadó, 2019. 419–436. The same phenomenon is discussed in its historical context by one of Hungary’s leading contemporary thinkers: “[Why did Hungarian Jews] remain Jewish? [...] Why did they not become Hungarians [Czechs, Poles, Romanians] of the Mosaic faith [in the way that in the western parts of the German lands Jews did indeed become Germans of the Mosaic faith]? *I feel that they were very much on the pathway to this.* But then came the Holocaust. And nothing and no one will ever erase the memory of this, and not only from the survivors and their descendants. *Is it perhaps the traces of these memories that I recognise in the Other?*” Vajda (2018): op. cit. 5.

¹⁶⁰ In the interests of the never-attainable, complete (historical) Truth, I have to say that while this “knowledge” would have made it easier to do so in theory, the thoroughly politicised, enduringly estate-like (suspicious) character of Hungarian social relationships and the complete and total identification that it *demand*s from both sides, did not, ultimately, make it possible for me to fit fully into any of the key segments or categories. That is to say, anything that I gained on the swings, I lost on the roundabouts (Cf. Tóth [1991]: op. cit.), and see further Borsi-Kálmán (2002): op. cit. 232–234, 264–266; Borsi-Kálmán (2018): op. cit. 179–190; and also Péter N. Nagy’s conversation with lead researcher Luca Kristóf in: *A világ pörög, az elitlista stabil. A kulturális kiválóságokról szóló felmérésről* [The world spins, the list of elites stays still. On the survey conducted among outstanding cultural figures]. *Élet és Irodalom*, 17 May 2019. 7.

and its relative (but at the same very real) weight. This is evidenced not only by the unusual, almost half-a-door-wide plaque in white marble that bears the inscription *The Jewish Community of Szinérváralja*, but also by how it stands out from the forest of Polish, Ukrainian, Romanian, etc. texts by virtue of the fact that it is written *in the Hungarian language* and, furthermore, has had the ancient Hungarian coat-of-arms engraved on it.¹⁶¹

Appendix

By way of a melancholy memorial I list here the personal data of those (including my father's playmates, some born in the same year as he, 1920) who are recorded as having been born in Szinérváralja:

- Benedikt*, Miklós, 17 April 1913 (mother's maiden name: Judit Stern) – disappeared: Dubenko, 23 January 1943.
- Berger*, Jenő, 17 June 1907 (mmn: Mária Dávid) – disappeared: Alekseyevka, 17 January 1943.
- Berkovics*, László, 1915 (mmn: Gizella Markovits) – disappeared: 21 December 1942.
- Berkovics*, Sándor, 7 February 1920 (mmn: Gizella Moskovics) – disappeared: Ilovskoye, January 1943.
- Bíró*, Géza, 28 November 1909 (mmn: Ilona Neumann) – died: Szatmárnémeti, 11 November 1944.
- Dolf*, Hermann, 30 August 1917 (mmn: Veron Goldberger) – disappeared: January 1943.
- Felberbaum*, Lajos, 1918 (mmn: Eszter Markovits) – disappeared: Novy Mir, 25 January 1943.
- Grosz*, Géza, 1 March 1902 (mmn: Vilma Schoberl) – disappeared: Atamanskoye, 23 January 1943.
- Grosz*, Mór, 22 July 1920 (mmn: Berta Perl) – disappeared: Hoskoye, January 1943.
- Helprin*, Márton, 14 November 1920 (mmn: Regina Katz) – disappeared: Oziryany, 1 February 1944.
- Herskovits*, Ignác, 28 December 1903 (mmn: Matild Herskovits) – died: Dubenko, 22 January 1943.
- Herskovits*, István, 3 October 1921 (mmn: Matild Rosner) – wounded: Hajdúszoboszló, 21 August 1944.
- Herskovits*, László, 1919 (mmn: Matild Rosner) – disappeared: 17 January 1943.
- Herskovits*, Márton, 13 July 1913 (mmn: Matild Herskovits) – disappeared: Dubenko, 23 January 1943.
- Hossko*, József, 3 June 1920 (mmn: Rozália Löwy) – disappeared: Ilovskoye, January 1943.
- Izsák*, Ábrahám, 24 December 1910 (mmn: Hani Friedmann) – disappeared: Atamanskoye, 23 January 1943.
- Izsák*, Adolf, 10 December 1919 (mmn: Helén Najovics) – died: Nikolayevka, 17 January 1943.

¹⁶¹ I am grateful for this information to my former diplomatic colleague in Bucharest, József Nagy, who later served as Ambassador in Chişinău and Bogotá. I was able to confirm this with my own eyes in the summer of 2008, on my first visit to Israel.

- Izsák, Jenő*, 26 August 1914 (mmn: Hani Friedmann) – disappeared: Atamanskoye, 28 January 1943.¹⁶²
- Markovits, Sándor*, 6 March 1908 (mmn: Regina Glück) – disappeared: Atamanskoye, 23 January 1943.
- Moskovits, Sámuel*, 19 September 1909 (mmn: Eszter Salamon) – disappeared: Budeny, 16 January 1943.
- Neumann, Sándor*, 1911 (mmn: Szerén Weil) – died (no further data available).
- Simon, Jenő*, 1919 (mmn: Helén Steinberger) – disappeared: Shimonkovce, 23 March 1943.
- Weisz, Zoltán*, 1911 (mmn: Malvina Izsák) – disappeared: Hungarian eastern front, January 1943.¹⁶³

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¹⁶² See Dr Gavriel bar Shaked (ed.): *Nevek. Munkaszázadok veszteségei a keleti magyar hadművelési területeken* [Names of Jewish Victims of Hungarian Labour Battalions], vol. II. A–J, New York, 1992, Szól a Kakas Már – Beate and Serge Klarsfeld Foundation – Yad Vashem. 50, 56, 68, 69, 82, 171, 225, 386, 392, 461, 474, 475, 504, 516.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* vol. III. K–ZS. 232, 266, 293, 513, 704.

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