



# Pilgrimage and State-Security: Visiting the Tombs of Tzadikim in the Socialist Hungary—Before 1989

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## Abstract

Visiting the graves of the (Hasidic) Rebbes of Bodrogkeresztúr, Nagykálló, Olaszliszka, Sátoraljaújhely and other (Hasidic) places of worship are unique manifestations of Jewish popular religiosity in Hungary. These visits are mainly made on the anniversaries of the deaths of the great Rabbis (“Yahrzeit”). The literature does not pay much attention to the fact that these customs were still alive during the decades of Socialism, and even after 1957, although to a limited extent, foreign citizens also took part in these pilgrimages. The pilgrims were monitored by State security. The increase in the intensity of state security surveillance was not related to religiosity, but to the anti-Zionist state policy that emerged in Eastern Europe after the Six-Day-War, which saw all Jewish organizations as Zionism. The study gives an account of the Rabbis behind the custom, the religious significance of the visit and its role in local society. At the same time, it also shows how the memory of the Hasidic “wonder rabbis” was passed on during the decades of the Hungarian Socialist Kádár regime. Moreover it presents how (from the point of view of the Socialist regime) the pilgrimage (*peregrinatio religiosa*) and participating in it became elements of the power-relationship system and what it meant for the church politics of the period.

**Keywords** Hungary · Orthodoxy · Pilgrimage · State security

## Introduction

This paper examines the phenomenon of pilgrimages to the tombs of the Miracle Rabbis that took place during the Kádár era, a significant time characterized by socialism in Hungary. The discourse commences with delving into the historical

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background of Hungarian Jews, then transitioning to an exposition on the overarching characteristics of Jewish pilgrimages. The following text discusses the Hungarian Orthodox Jewish efforts in the 1960s to attract the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, to Hungary for the purpose of renovating the tomb of the dynasty's progenitor, Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, located near Sátoraljaújhely. This essay examines the Jewish pilgrimages throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, focusing on the perspective of Hungarian state security. This study draws upon distinct Hungarian state security sources, specifically the observations made on visitors to the tombs of the Miracle Rabbis. These materials provide compelling evidence of the enduring presence of the old Jewish tradition inside a socialist Hungary that exhibited hostility towards religion. The present analysis pertains to the constrained scope of the Jewish religious institution, situated amidst the socialist (or Communist) governmental apparatus and the congregational membership. This institution not only served as an intermediary for the top-down implementation of state directives but also made sporadic attempts to pursue its own agenda. Furthermore, this investigation elucidates the shortcomings of said agenda in its pursuit of autonomy.

Nevertheless, comprehending this entire phenomenon necessitates an overview of the historical context.

## Historical Background

Hungarian Jewry underwent a fundamental transformation after the Holocaust. Researchers generally estimate the number of survivors of the Holocaust at between 180,000–200,000, with the loss of about 78 percent of provincial Jewry, compared to 52 percent in the capital.<sup>1</sup>

1948, also referred to as the (Mátyás) Rákosi era, was the beginning of total Communist rule in Hungary. Communist ideology removed the Jewish question—which concerned mostly issues with Jews returning from the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and local Jewish connection to the State of Israel—off the agenda, shrouding public life and the media in a shadowy silence.

In principle, the state officially guaranteed the free exercise of religion and regular support for the Jews, but the reality was quite different. By the early 1950s, the activities of Jewish religious communities had greatly diminished. Religious education in their schools was also ended and in 1949 the Hebrew-language baccalaureate was abolished.

Until 1951, *Új Élet* was officially a newspaper for all the Jews of Hungary, including those who did not attend any synagogues. Subsequently, the word “Jew” was changed to “Israelite,” which proved to be a significant move.<sup>2</sup> *Új Élet* was initially a political newspaper, but later it focused exclusively on the internal, religious affairs of the Jews, because that was the only way the Hungarian state recognized the Jews as an entity.

<sup>1</sup> Kinga Frojimovics 2008. p. 374 and after. (Hungarian.).

<sup>2</sup> [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Uj\\_Elet](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Uj_Elet) (Accessed 3 June 2023).

The devastation of the Second World War and the Holocaust redrew the religious map of Hungarian Jewry. A significant proportion (at least half) of the survivors continued to live in Budapest. A 1948 survey by the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress found 275 Jewish communities (in the countryside alone), but by 1950, after the unification of the Jewish community, which was soon to be discussed, a total of 170 communities remained in the whole country. Due to migration to Budapest, more than 70 percent of the Jewish population lived in the capital by that time.<sup>3</sup> We might add that only about half of this number of congregations (170) actually constituted a real Jewish community, while the rest were very small micro-communities of a few people.

Jewish Orthodoxy in Hungary also suffered disproportionate losses, with the destruction of the largely rural Orthodox Jewish population reinforcing the dominance of the Neologue of Budapest. Orthodoxy did not surrender to fate, but quickly set up yeshivot and established *Aguna*<sup>4</sup> courts to make life easier for women who wanted to remarry after the loss of their husbands.

In February 1950—under pressure from the state—the Orthodox and the Neologue Jewish streams merged. The new umbrella organization was called the MIOK (National Bureau of Hungarian Israelites). There was some autonomy for the Orthodox branch, with a separate Orthodox rabbinical council and an Orthodox representative in the joint organization. The unification of the streams in 1950 meant that only one single Jewish community could remain in an administrative area, except in Budapest, where, under the supervision of the Budapest Israelite Congregation, Orthodoxy became a branch.

Even after the Holocaust, Hungarian Orthodoxy did not give up its strict principles and insisted on the observance of religious norms. Membership of the Budapest Orthodox community increased slightly, with over 1,400 applying for membership after 1945 (due to rural relocations), although 20 per cent of these were rejected. The number of taxpayers may have been more than this at the same time. Membership was only open to those who observed the Sabbath, ate kosher meals and could produce witnesses to this, so the Orthodox community did not automatically accept applicants. In the capital, the majority of the strictly religious Jews, mainly living in the inner districts of Budapest, were among the smallholders who were negatively affected by the nationalization of property that was occurring in this period. The Jewish community tried to ensure that its members were integrated into the new Socialist world by setting up Sabbath-keeping cooperatives—with the help of the National Bureau of Hungarian Israelites and with the permission of the Hungarian government. In these workplaces, they did not have to break the religious commandment to observe the Sabbath, and their children's absence from school (on Sabbath and religious festivals) was allowed. However, not everyone could adapt to this new world.

<sup>3</sup> Kinga Frojimovics 2008, 376–378. (Hungarian.).

<sup>4</sup> *Agunah* means: “chained”, a Jewish woman who cannot divorce halakhically or according to the Jewish Law.

The tensions between the particular forced unification of the minority Orthodox community and the majority Neologues were somewhat mitigated by the fact that state pressure led to a decrease in the number of Jewish adherents and accelerated the progress of secularization. After 1956, the process of selling and transferring community property accelerated, with many synagogues being sold by the leaders of the MIOK itself.

What, then, was Hungarian Jewry like after 1956? We only have estimates of the number of Jews, since no census by religion was conducted during that period. Researchers estimate the number of Hungarian Jews in 1960 at around 115,000; during the revolution, 20–30,000 people (many of them Orthodox Jews) may have fled the country, and this figure of over 100,000 represents the number who remained after emigration. Some of the emigrants went to Israel, others to other Western countries (Great Britain, France, the United States, Canada, Australia, etc.), where there was already a Hungarian diaspora and (along with it and in parallel) Hungarian-speaking Jewish communities. These aspects should be taken into account even in light of the fact that emigrants mostly followed individual strategies. After 1956, the demographic structure of Jewry changed fundamentally and in a largely negative way. The number of rural Jews dwindled and many moved to the capital. The countryside was slowly emptying out and (presumably) those who moved to Budapest did not add to the number of religious people.

The strength of the Jewish institutions in Budapest also weakened, due to the declining numbers and the weakening of the community supporting them. The situation of the Jewish secondary school in Budapest is a good example of this emptying out: In 1956, 190 students enrolled, while a year later the number was only 47. The Jewish community had about 15 000 tax-paying members in 1956.<sup>5</sup>

Some groups of Orthodox Jews in Hungary, partly under Hasidic influence, have always had a special respect for their rabbis, and pilgrimage sites were established near the graves of rabbis in the country. The main places of pilgrimage were mainly in north-eastern Hungary in two counties: besides Olaszliszka (Borsod county), Bodrogkeresztúr (Borsod county), Nagykálló (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county) and Sátoraljaújhely (Borsod county), there were other important sites. With the decline of popular religiosity and the dwindling of local communities, the importance of the already significant processes of domestic and foreign migration increased, although this process was not supported by the state.

Throughout the whole period, the relationship of Hungarian Jewry with Zionism and Israel was very important. In the early years of the regime, there were several Zionist lawsuits in Hungary, while at the same time there were diplomatic and trade relations between Hungary and the Jewish state. On 20 October 1949, after lengthy and difficult negotiations, an agreement was reached between the two countries to allow the emigration of 3100 people. After the Zionist movement was disbanded in the spring of 1949, the Israeli diplomatic corps took the position that its activities could not be allowed to endanger the local Jewish community, and so its contacts with the local official Jewish community were kept to a minimum. Israeli

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Zsolt Beke (Holocaust Memorial Center, Budapest) for the data.

officials also refrained from attending public or semi-public events with Jewish figures in Hungary. During 1956–1957, after the Hungarian Revolution, some 8700 immigrants arrived in Israel from Hungary. In the 1960s, diplomatic relations were remained cordial, but after the Six-Day War in 1967, all the Eastern European socialist countries (with the exception of Romania) severed their relations with the Jewish state. Hungary also maintained diplomatic relations with the United States and other Western countries, but very much like Israel before the break these relations were strained and all diplomats were under surveillance by the state security services.

It is also very important to note that, in addition to the unfavorable foreign policy environment, several members of the Jewish community leadership were agents of the state security service, which meant that the state knew almost everything about the activities and internal matters of official Jewry.

### General Information on Jewish Pilgrimages

Jewish pilgrimage is a very old institution. It has some similarities to and differences from Christian pilgrimages, with the common feature that the faithful pray at the graves of the holy person and/or teacher/rabbi to ask for their intercession and help. Visits to the final resting place of the pious were known in the Holy Land as early as the Middle Ages. In Jewish religious practice, Passover,<sup>6</sup> Shavuot<sup>7</sup> and Succoth<sup>8</sup> were the main pilgrimage festivals although, since the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Holy Temple they had ceased to be pilgrimages in any concrete sense, since Jews could no longer make pilgrimages to Jerusalem itself. In this sense, modern Jewish pilgrimages are not ‘pilgrimage festivals’, nor do they have the religious significance of, for example, Catholic pilgrimages. In practice, pilgrimages following the destruction of the Holy Temple entail the faithful visiting the graves of prominent rabbis, lighting candles on their graves and praying, while it is also customary to say Tehillim (“tilem”) i.e. psalms. The faithful make requests and leave tags (containing them) on the graves of the rabbis. These visits/pilgrimages take place on the date of the deceased’s death (according to the Jewish calendar), and this anniversary is called *jahrzeit* in traditional places to this day, when the graves are visited.

Although it was customary to visit rabbinical tombs in other parts of Hungary, this type of more formalized pilgrimage was only typical of the North-Eastern part of the country, because it was there that the geographical extent of Hasidism, organized around the figures of the great rabbis/rabbis/Tzadikim, reached in historical Hungary. Moreover, the rabbis themselves lived and worked in that corner of the country, although their influence was much more far reaching. Visiting the tombs of the Hasidic miracle-rabbis and (more broadly) practicing the cult of these figures, who were in constant dialogue with the people, were the purest manifestations of popular religiosity.

<sup>6</sup> The Jewish “Passover”, Nisan 15–21.

<sup>7</sup> The feast of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, Sivan 6.

<sup>8</sup> The feast of Tabernacles, Tishri 15–21.

In Hungary, there are still three important pilgrimage sites (although several other sites are also visited, for example in Mád, Tokaj and Olaszliszka), one of which is the tomb of Eizik (Jichak) Taub (1751–1821) in Nagykálló, in present-day Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. The song “The cock has crowed” is attributed to him. According to the Jewish calendar, his grave is visited on the 7th day of the month of Adar, which is also (according to tradition) the day commemorating the birth and death of Moses. During the decades of Socialism, this date provided an opportunity to make a visit to the tomb in Nagykálló as part of the day’s festivities. In addition, the Chevra Kadisha (the burial society) usually held its annual general meeting on Zayin Adar, followed by a dinner (after a day-long fast for its members).

The second such pilgrimage site is the tomb of Mos(h)e Teitelbaum (1759–1841), the founder of Hasidism in Hungary, in Sátoraljaújhely (in present-day Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County). He died on the 28th of Tammuz, according to the Jewish calendar. Teitelbaum was a student of the Lublin rabbi and was not originally a Hasid. He is said to have predicted the future greatness of Lajos Kossuth, the famous Hungarian personality of the 1848/49 Revolution. There are several versions of this story: one maintains that Kossuth visited the rabbi when he was still in high school and that he predicted his greatness. Other accounts claim that Kossuth, a sickly child, was taken to the rabbi by his mother, who told him that he would become the country’s leader when he grew up. Teitelbaum was a very influential person. After the loss of territory by Hungary under the Treaty of Trianon, on the anniversary of his death, so many people wanted to visit his grave that in the 1920s that the border between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was opened, meaning that during the *yahrzeits* it was possible to travel from one country to the other without being subject to border controls.

The third significant pilgrimage site, the grave of Yeshaya (Saje) Steiner (1851–1925), is located in Bodrogkeresztúr (also in present-day Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county) and is visited on 3 Iyar, according to the Jewish calendar. Steiner was born in Zboro (now Zborov, Slovakia) and educated in Büdszentmihály (now Tiszavasvári). His image was surrounded by legends, and even Christians sought him out for help. In the 1970s, one of Ilona Dobos’s<sup>9</sup> informants (who also devoted much attention to the village and the figure of its miracle rabbis) stated that: “Both (followers of) Christianity and Judaism, anyone could come to him for advice. The Jews and Christians alike could ask him for advice. It was the town of Little David. They lived off the Jews. There were poor women who were widows. He called [them] to clean, to whitewash, to carry wax, to cut wood. That priest had a heart, a soul like the soul of Jesus Christ, he gave to everyone. Flour, sugar, turkey came by wagon from abroad. When one poor person was in need, he helped everyone. What he received, he distributed. [...] There was a very poor man, he bought him a small horse. He was a godly man. He just brought him a little water, and then he lived on that. He fed his whole family. He paid for the whole week in cash.” (Dobos 1990)

<sup>9</sup> Ilona Dobos (1922–1993). Hungarian ethnographer, member of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research. In the course of his work, he collected more than 5,000 folk tales and hundreds of historical sagas.

These miraculous figures were somewhat “specialized”: some excelled in healing, while others (like Bodrogkeresztur) were renowned for “taking care” of material/business matters. Until the Second World War, when there were still many Orthodox, these pilgrimages were attended by many thousands of people, both from Hungary and abroad. The railways ran special trains from the surrounding towns, often with discounts, and people also arrived by bus and private car. Several leaders of the official Orthodox representation, the Orthodox Central Bureau, were also represented at the pilgrimages, as this kind of popular religiosity, including the special respect accorded to rabbis, was important for non-Hasidic Orthodoxy (Glässer 2006).

For a long time, the religious perception of pilgrimages was not unified within Judaism: there were Orthodox religious authorities who, for various reasons, opposed the visits to the tombs of the Tzadikim. Hatam Sofer (1762–1839), a highly respected rabbi from Pozsony (today: Bratislava), who was of great importance for Hungarian (non-Hasidic) Orthodoxy, was also critical of the spread of the custom, even though his tomb would also later become a pilgrimage site. With the mainstreaming of Hasidism after the Second World War, pilgrimages became fully accepted. There was, and still is, a specific customary system of pilgrimages, which can also be observed during the period under discussion: many people wrote religious law manuals (Zinner 2001), and there were also people in the Hasidic rabbis’ circles who reported on the practice of these customs and on visiting graves.

The Holocaust almost completely eradicated this popular religiosity from the Hungarian rural social base, which was also eroded by the lack of religion. Great Hasidic Rabbis left Hungary to settle in the United States, Canada and Israel (Frojimovics 2008). Although there was a slight Orthodox predominance in the number of religious communities in 1946, according to data based on the 1949 census, nearly 80 percent of the country’s religious Jewish communities were Neolog (66 percent in 1930), while the remainder were divided between 18.3 percent Orthodox (30 percent in 1930) and adherents of the status quo ante (4 percent in 1930).<sup>10</sup>

The political situation after 1949, with the communist takeover, was also not conducive to maintaining the same level of respect for the miraculous, at least among the wider public, as before. The (forced) merger of Hungarian Orthodoxy with the Neologue in 1950 did not strengthen this type of religious tradition either. The newspaper of the official nation-wide Jewish organization of Hungary, the National Representation of Hungarian Israelites (MIOK), *Új Élet*, did not report on any grave visits until the early 1960s. Only Ernő Róth (1908–1991), a highly accomplished teacher at the Rabbinical Seminary (and, after Samuel Löwinger’s emigration in 1950, director of the institution along with Professor Chief Rabbi Sándor Scheiber, alternating every year), dealt with the subject. Until his emigration in 1956, Róth characterized the religious knowledge of the wonder rabbi of Bodrogkeresztúr as insignificant—although he admitted that he prayed devoutly.<sup>11</sup> Besides him, the

<sup>10</sup> Gyula Zeke 1990, 152. Quoted and discussed earlier, see Frojimovics 2008. (Hungarian.).

<sup>11</sup> .1 December 1949, 5–6. *Új Élet* Vallásunk nagy mesterei. II. (A bodrogkeresztúri rebbe). (The great masters of our religion. II /The Rebbe of Bodrogkeresztur/.) Róth mockingly noted that after liberation he met a famous Proselite (the so-called rebbe) on the streets of Pest who, as a result of the Jewish laws,



publicist Nándor Hegedűs (1884–1969) touched on the subject in the early 1950s, in several articles highlighting the love of the rabbi (Rebbe) of Satmar—who, incidentally, left Hungary on the Kasztner train in 1944—for the “Western imperialists”.<sup>12</sup> In any case, the subject of pilgrimages was not even mentioned in the official Jewish press (which comprised a single newspaper) until the late 1950s. This was not only due to the limited coverage of the subject and the general mood of anti-religiousness (as if the Jewish religious practice itself was somewhat ashamed of the central denominational press), but also because *Új Élet* was characterized by a kind of misguided domestic and foreign policy credo: it aimed to explain world politics and orient its readers along these lines. Consequently, the journal assumed state-related duties by providing coverage on global politics and domestic affairs in Hungary, albeit with the notable omission of reporting on the Jewish population. It accomplished this in a manner similar to that of the state media, which is non-Jewish. As a result, it added little to its own community while slavishly copying the Communist regime’s journals, lowering its readership (albeit we don’t have data). On the basis of this approach, the various folk traditions of the Jewish religion were considered irrational and outmoded, and the newspaper sought to negate them.

Hungarian Orthodoxy was also weakened by emigration. From 1956 onwards, even the remnants left the country, with few religious functionaries remaining. After 1956, about 10 ritual slaughterers remained in Hungary, whereas 59 had been doing this work before that year.<sup>13</sup> Jewish religious life, moreover, operated under strong party-state control of the churches, and maintaining or making transnational contacts was already made difficult from the late 1940s onwards by the closure of borders, the tightening of entry rules, the political embargoes of foreign states, and the Hungarian state’s own suspicion of (Western) foreigners entering the country.

After 1956, however, something changed: More and more written/archival sources testify that the tombs of the Tzadikim began to be visited more frequently again during this period. Such visits may, of course, have also taken place in the 1950s, but it is safe to say that they did not receive even semi-official support and representation. In 1961, the Nyíregyháza Jewish community sent a letter asking for money (5,000 forints) to repair the cemetery in Nagykálló. In his letter, Chief Rabbi Jenő Schück (1895–1974), president of the nationwide Orthodox Rabbinical Council within the unified organization (and also Chief Rabbi of Miskolc), wrote that since it was the burial place of the ‘Holy’ (rabbi) of Nagykálló, he considered it justified to allocate the sum urgently, subject of course to careful scrutiny:

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Footnote 11 (continued)

had permanently returned to “the faith of his ancestors”, which means he became Christian again.. (Hungarian.).

<sup>12</sup> See two articles by *Nándor Hegedűs* in *Új Élet* in 1952. 5 July 3. Teitelbaum és Eisenhower. (Teitelbaum and Eisenhower) and 28 August, 5.: Joel Teitelbaum Londonban. (Joel Teitelbaum in London). (Hungarian.).

<sup>13</sup> Schück Jenő 1959: Az orthodoxia a felszabadulás után. (Orthodoxy after the Liberation.) In *Új Élet Naplár* 1959 (5719/5720). 156–162. Budapest: MIOK., (Hungarian.).



In view of the fact that it is the burial place of the Holy /Rabbi/ of Nagykálló, I consider it appropriate to allocate the amount as a matter of urgency, subject to careful control, of course.<sup>14</sup>

In March 1962, the leaders of the MIOK, during their visit to Debrecen and the surrounding area, discussed the restoration of the (Jewish) prayer house in Nagykálló,<sup>15</sup> and in early May, *Új Élet* reported on Schück's pilgrimage to Mád in April (9 Nisan = 13 April).<sup>16</sup>

At this point it is worth going into a little more detail about Jenő Schück, who became one of the main protagonists of these events.<sup>17</sup> Schück was a prominent (and undeservedly forgotten) representative of post-war orthodoxy in Hungary. He was born in Ónod, where his father (Mayer) was also a rabbi, studied in the yeshivas in Mád, Tolcsva and Sebeskellemes, and received his rabbinical diploma in 1917 in Bratislava, from the famous Chief Rabbi Akiba Schreiber (1878–1959), a descendant of Hatam Sofer.<sup>18</sup> He began his career in Moravia, then moved to Budapest and married the granddaughter of the Orthodox Chief Rabbi Reich Koppel (1838–1929) of Pest. This background (and marriage) elevated Chief Rabbi Schück, who unfortunately had no children of his own, to the elite of Hungarian Orthodoxy. Between 1942 and 1944 he also served as a rabbi for labor camp inmates, and after the liberation he again became a “camp chaplain” and a member of the family law Bet Din (rabbinical court) until 1950. After the forced Jewish unification, he was appointed rapporteur for Orthodox affairs (with his own office in Síp Street), and after the death of József Czitron (1895–1957)<sup>19</sup> he was made president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council. In 1958 he was also elected Chief Rabbi of Miskolc, a position that quite important in the circumstances of the time.

From the early 1960s onwards, official reports on pilgrimages were regularly published in the main Jewish press organs. The *Új Élet* began to report on pilgrimages to Nagykálló and Sátoraljaújhely.<sup>20</sup> In March 1963, for example, *Új Élet* reported that in the framework of the country-wide celebrations of the Zayin Adar,

<sup>14</sup> MAOIH Archives, Schück bequest.

<sup>15</sup> 15 March: 4. *Új Élet*. A MIOK vezetőinek látogatása Debrecenben, Nyíregyházán és Nagykállón (Visit of the MIOK leaders to Debrecen, Nyíregyháza and Nagykálló). 1962. The visit took place on 7 March. (Hungarian.).

<sup>16</sup> 9 Nisan 1962. 1 May: 3. 1962. *Új Élet*. “Rabbi of Miskolc, many members of the Jewish community of Hegyalja made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the great Tzadik.” Rabbi Nathan Feithel mádi gaon századik Jahrzeitje (“The 100th Jahrzeit of Rabbi Nathan Feithel, Gaon of Mad”).

<sup>17</sup> Baruch Oberländer 2016. (Hungarian.).

<sup>18</sup> 16 October 4. *Új Kelet*. Jenő Schück, President of the Hungarian Orthodox Rabbinical Council (Pál Benedek). The article (based on the conversation) was written on one of Schück's trips to Israel. (Hungarian.).

<sup>19</sup> Chief Rabbi József Czitron was the subject of an article by Sándor Bacskai (on Hungarian), see Bacskai 1997a. He describes how the Orthodox Rabbinical Council meeting (12 July 1951) chaired by Czitron also discussed emigration and the social and spiritual welfare of the displaced/deported Jews.

<sup>20</sup> He also reported that on Sunday, 21 July, the Jahrzeit of Moses Teitelbaum would be held in Sátoraljaújhely (1 July 1963 6. *Új Élet*). (Hungarian.).

the Orthodox faithful of the various Jewish communities of the country organized a pilgrimage to the tomb of the Tzadik of Nagykálló (15 March 1963, 1 *Új Élet*).

Moreover, Jenő Schück wrote in 1964 (to Imre Kulcsár, president of the Jewish community of Debrecen) that the chief cantor of Debrecen had accompanied a foreign pilgrim to Nagykálló (2 November 1964 MAOIH Archives, Bequest of Schück.)

In 1964, in a relatively obscure news item buried towards the end of the paper, *Új Élet* reported that on the fortieth anniversary of the death of the rabbi of Bodrogkeresztúr, the ohel (ajhel), a small building around the Jewish tomb, had been rebuilt on the initiative of Miklós Kálmán, the president of the North Hungarian Jewish community district, with the financial support of the MIOK board, and that three famous rabbis from Brooklyn were present at the inauguration.<sup>21</sup> The inauguration speech was given by Jenő Schück. The short article, in which an anonymous author described how pilgrims from all over the country had come to the event, clearly showed a complete change of tone. The disparaging, contemptuous, scornful and sometimes politically offensive attitude of the late 1940s and early 1950s towards popular Judaism and Hasidism (which was not part of the mainstream of *Új Élet*) seemed to have disappeared from the specifically Jewish press: the rabbi's life and trials were now written about with great respect. Yoel Beer, the Chief Rabbi of São Paulo, who spent time in Europe in 1964, visited the rabbinical clergy of Sátoraljaújhely, Bodrogkeresztúr, Olaszliszka, Nagykálló, Nyírbátor and Újfehértó as well as visiting the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Romania for the same purpose, and this was reported in *Új Élet*.<sup>22</sup>

In June 1965, nothing seemed more natural than for the leaders of the MIOK, President Endre Sós (1905–1969), Municipal District President Imre Kulcsár, Municipal District Secretary General Dezső Gábor and Municipal District Secretary Mihály Leitner of Debrecen to make a trip to Nagykálló, to “the grave of the great tzadik,” while visiting the Jewish communities of Nyírbátor, Nyíregyháza, Kisvárd and Mátészalka.<sup>23</sup> It seemed, therefore, that with the lessening of external, state pressure, local and national Jewish leaders were ready to concentrate their efforts in northeastern Hungary, which was otherwise completely politically harmless to the Kádár regime. The cult of the miracle Rabbi, based on a local Jewish community that had ‘thinned out’ considerably in number and importance after the Revolution and the 1956–1957 emigrations, was reintegrated into the official Jewish public consciousness (which otherwise moved within a very narrow field) as an important phenomenon of the Hungarian Jewish tradition.

<sup>21</sup> 1 May 1964, 6. *Új Élet* A bodrogkeresztúri rabbi emlékezete. (The memory of the rabbi of Bodrogkeresztúr.) The three American (Brooklyn) rabbis who were there: Akiba Glancz, Ezekiel März and Eichenbaum.

<sup>22</sup> 15 November 1964, 2. *Új Élet*. A São Pauló-i főrabbi látogatása. (Visit of the Chief Rabbi of São Paulo.) (Hungarian.)

<sup>23</sup> 1 July 1965, 4. *Új Élet*.

## New Aspect: The Emergence of the Possibility of Religious Tourism

Between 8 April and 24 May 1965, the Orthodox Chief Rabbi Jenő Schück visited the United States and came into contact with leading members of the Satmar Hasidic community in New York. The visit itself was initiated by Yeshiva University in New York that spring, where Schück had been invited to give lectures. As he wrote to the President of the ÁEH:

“Dear Mr. President! The Yeshiva University in New York, which is a college of Talmudic Studies, has invited me to give lectures. You have already sent me the round-trip air ticket. My brother’s critical health condition and the confirmation celebration (sic! NA) of my blessed brother’s first grandchild on 10 April encourage me to respectfully request the President to kindly allow me to travel next time on April 7.”<sup>24</sup> During his stay, the Chief Rabbi—who also had relatives living in New York—engaged in extensive “diplomatic” activities, and in addition to his (otherwise natural) talks with the Hungarian ambassador, he also met with a number of American Orthodox leaders and rabbis, and gave a lecture at Bnai Brith, the Jewish fraternal organization. In a memo to the State Office for Church Affairs (called in Hungarian: ÁEH), dated 31 May 1965, the Chief Rabbi did not mention anything other than that the meetings that had taken place.<sup>25</sup> “My most notable visits were: firstly, I visited Yoel Teitelbaum, the former Chief Rabbi of Satmar, a world-famous leader of Hasidic Orthodoxy. His loyalty to Hungarian popular democracy is well known”—he wrote in his report to the ÁEH, seeking to arouse sympathy for the Satmar Rebbe.<sup>26</sup> Schück was also a skillful diplomat and is reported, for example, to have defended the Hungarian government’s financial support for religious education at a press conference in response to a journalist’s question (of course, the earlier nationalizations and trials were not mentioned), by referring to Rabbi Teitelbaum, the “leader” of the Orthodox camp, as having a similar opinion on the US government’s proposal along similar lines, and by contrasting this Orthodox position with the opinion of an American Reform rabbi, Joachim Prinz. According to a handwritten note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Schück’s visit was also a positive experience for the Hungarian Foreign Ministry (KÜM), and his report was sent to the KÜM’s American desk.<sup>27</sup>

After Schück’s visit, in the summer of 1965, he was interviewed by *Új Élet*,<sup>28</sup> where he recounted how Teitelbaum (with whom he had two long conversations),

<sup>24</sup> Letter of Jenő Schück (with the header of the Hungarian Israelite Orthodox Rabbinical Council of Budapest) to József Prantner (President of the ÁEH). Budapest, 22 March 1965. Signature and name of Jenő Schück. On the reverse of the letter: Prantner proposes to go out IV.9. He has received his passport. 9.IV.1965. Notified the Foreign Ministry 10.IV. MNL OL XIX-A-21-a- K-2-30/a/1965.

<sup>25</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-a- K-2-30/a/1965. Report on Schück’s trip to the USA – a positive experience for the KÜM (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). VI.3. 3 VI (Prantner concurs) Report on Chief Rabbi Jenő Schück’s trip to North America (8 April – 24 May 1965) MNL OL XIX-A-21-a- K-2-30/a/1965.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Az amerikai ortodoxia körében. Beszélgetés Schück Jenővel, az Orthodox Rabbitanács elnökével. (Among American Orthodoxy. A conversation with Jenő Schück, President of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council.) 15 June 1965, 4. *Új Élet*. (Hungarian.).

the Chief Rabbi of the Szmár Hasidic Community, had inquired about the “holy Hungarian rabbinical graves” in New York. He had reassured him that the Jewish representation (the MIOK) was taking care of them—at least the rabbinical graves in the cemeteries of Olaszliszka, Bodrogkeresztur and Nagykálló—and keeping them in order. Schück’s position has been consistently reinforced by the fact that the rabbinical cemeteries, which have been put on the map of religious tourism, have already attracted foreigners. In the same year, *Új Élet* did not omit to mention the “unusually large number” of pilgrims who came to the city, including many foreign rabbis and “brothers in faith.”<sup>29</sup>

Schück did not stop there. On 28 March 1966, he wrote a letter to Sándor Telepó, one of the group leaders of the ÁEH, in response to an inquiry from the World Jewish Congress, asking which foreign Jewish organizations and personalities should be invited. In the letter, Schück underlined his wish that, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the death of the miracle rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum of Sátorajújhely, the Hungarian state should invite his descendant, the current Chief Rabbi of Szmár, Yoel Teitelbaum, to Hungary.<sup>30</sup> He also pointed out that the famous rabbi should be invited during the Yareit (which fell on 16 July that year) and that pilgrims could also visit other places of rabbinical importance in the area. As Schück put it,

From an Orthodox point of view, I would consider the invitation of Yoel Teitelbaum, former Chief Rabbi of Szmár, now the Orthodox Hasidic Chief Rabbi of Williamsburg, N.Y., to be particularly important, or at least interesting. In a literal sense, his coming to Budapest would be a world sensation. [...] Nowadays, especially since the increase in tourism, his tomb is heavily visited by both national and foreign congregants. Moses Teitelbaum, the great-grandfather of the dynasty founder, died in the summer of 1841. [...] Saturday, 16 July 1966, the day of the proclamation of the new moon in synagogue time, will mark the 125th anniversary of his death. This remarkable date would be worthy of an invitation by Chief Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum to make a jubilee pilgrimage to the tomb of his immortal great-grandfather. His coming here would be an inspiration to Orthodox Jewry throughout the world. Hundreds of pilgrims would come from overseas [...] to Hungary on this occasion. Given the short time available, this tourist opportunity should be organized quickly and professionally. The Archpriest should be invited with the reverence due to his person, [and] the cemetery of Sátorajújhely [...] should be restored, because the pilgrimage of this world-famous Orthodox Archpriest would not only attract hundreds of believers now, but would also revive the ancient pilgrim-

<sup>29</sup> 15 March 1966, 6. *Új Élet*. Nagykállói Járzeit. (Járzeit of Nagykálló). The pilgrimage was on 7 Adar 5726, i.e. 27 February 1966. The event is described as a Kéver Ovaus (kever Avot), i.e. a visit to the tomb/grave of the Fathers, which is a traditional name. The event, organised by the Chevra Department and the Orthodox Section of Debrecen Jewish Community (“Tagozat” in Hungarian), was attended by Chief Rabbi Jenő Schück, Orthodox Section President Mihály Leitner, Rabbi Imre Sahn and Deputy Rabbi Sándor Deutsch.

<sup>30</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-c. 89. d. 5.0. A Zsidó Világkongresszus. Feljegyzések a szervezet feladatáról és működéséről (The World Jewish Congress. Notes on the tasks and functioning of the organization.) 28 March 1966.

age to the Sátoraljaújhely, Nagykálló and other Orthodox Jewish pilgrimage sites.<sup>31</sup>

The Orthodox Chief Rabbi must have been serious about the invitation, as he also wrote his invitation letter in Hebrew, which he sent to Teitelbaum's secretary, Yosef Ashkenazy, and dated 13 Nisan (i.e. 3 April) in Vienna. On the other hand, a Hungarian language telegram has also been found which announced the fact of the invitation and urged the agreement of the invited party. This telegram clearly stated that the Hanna Orthodox Social Kitchen, which would move to the Orthodox headquarters at 35 Kazinczy Street in Budapest, would be inaugurated during Yoel Teitelbaum's summer visit.<sup>32</sup> In the letter, written in Hebrew, he reported to Ashkenazy that state leaders had assured him that they would welcome Yoel Teitelbaum's visit.

It is not clear whether the ÁEH actually reacted to Schück's letter, but we do know that on 28 April he wrote a letter to Géza Seifert, the new president of the MIOK (Endre Sós had been dismissed in the meantime), in which he also suggested inviting the Satmar Rebbe.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Schück did not report on Seifert's letter to the ÁEH, although he did say that the "competent state bodies" would welcome the suggestion, and he also referred to his "softening" letter to Yosef Ashkenazy on the subject, to which the secretary replied that the Satmar Rebbe had studied the letter and would like to come. In a further development, he discussed in his letter that he had been visited in his Budapest office by an American Hasid, a certain "Mr. Weisz," who had brought a message from Ashkenazy. According to Mr. Weisz, the Hasidim of Satmar were very keen to visit Hungary, and so far, 400 people had already applied to go. If it became a reality, he said, more will come. Mr. Ashkenazy asked what the Hungarian political authorities and the Hungarian Jewish leadership, the MIOK and Orthodoxy, would say about the trip. Schück, anticipating a response, responded positively to the suggestions and was already planning to involve IBUSZ, the Hungarian state tourism company:

The pilgrimage would take place in mid-July. The prospect of large numbers of pilgrims travelling, accommodation, etc., makes the organization of the work involved urgent. The IBUSZ should be informed immediately through our Church Office. Let us not wait until we receive a definite answer from America, the state of probability already makes it our task to prepare the organizational work.<sup>34</sup>

It is safe to say that the ÁEH did not formally approve the request, which Schück had also composed, so it can be seen as a private action by Schück rather than an official initiative. In May 1966, the ÁEH took note of the plan as a special request from Hungarian Orthodoxy, and also noted that "Joél Teitelbaum is the most internationally recognized authority on contemporary Orthodoxy and is decidedly

<sup>31</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-c. 89. d. 5.0. *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> MAOIH Archives, Schück bequest. The Hanna kitchen was located in Kertész Street (Budapest) until 1966.

<sup>33</sup> MAOIH Archives. Schück bequest.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

anti-Zionist.”<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, the “local value” of the Satmar Rebbe, who had not been previously favored at all by the communist state, increased considerably as Hungarian state officials realized that he was opposed to Zionism. This perception of Teitelbaum was also in line with the semi-official Hungarian foreign policy perception, which maintained diplomatic relations with the Jewish state but was distrustful of it: it monitored and restricted the movements of its diplomats in Hungary. Moreover, state security not only kept track of many people with Zionist pasts, but also used agents within the Jewish mission to monitor the ‘movements’ of the Jewish community reduced to a religion.<sup>36</sup> Schück was clearly striving for an independent Orthodox foreign policy, distinctly different from the Neolog. Such a distinct policy would not be justified in terms of the number of Orthodox Jews in Hungary, but was absolutely legitimate in terms of the proportion of Orthodoxy in world Jewry, the nature of the Hungarian Jewish diaspora abroad and the importance of the Orthodox groups in it.

In the end, the organized visit did not take place, but even so the foreign pilgrims arrived one after another. On 9 July 1966 (28 Tammuz, according to the Jewish calendar), hundreds of Hungarian and foreign believers visited the tomb in Sátoraljaújhely, and Schück, representing Orthodoxy, recalled the life of the rabbi.<sup>37</sup> In 1967–1968, the pilgrimages, also by foreigners, continued.<sup>38</sup> In 1968, Rabbi “Jesaja” Grosz, the great-grandson of the late Steiner Shaye Miracle Rabbi, arrived from Brooklyn for a pilgrimage to Bodrogkeresztúr.<sup>39</sup> The rabbi had arranged a large siyum at Frida Winkler’s house and from there he made a pilgrimage to his great-grandfather’s grave.<sup>40</sup>

A letter from Schück to Géza Seifert in July 1968 reported the arrival of fifty foreign pilgrims (probably Hasidic Jews originally from Sátoraljaújhely), and that the

<sup>35</sup> ÁBTL 3.2.5 O-8-301/1. note dated 16 May 1966, Annex 2.

<sup>36</sup> It is typical of this controversial period that Schück’s next trip to the United States was not approved by the authorities in Hungary. On 16 November, 1965, the International Synagogue invited the Chief Rabbi to attend its dedication ceremony and to serve as patron at the dedication lunch on 6 February, 1966. On 16 November 1965, Sándor Telepó suggested, after prior discussion with the Belügyminisztérium (Ministry of Interior), that he should not go (because he had been to several capitalist countries in recent times, and because it was not an event of such great importance. MNL OL XIX-A-21-a-K-2-115/1965.

<sup>37</sup> “In the Orthodox Teaching House (shul – AN), on the occasion of the ceremony, they studied Mishnayes in public. After the service, the congregation’s leadership held a traditional siyum, where Chief Rabbi Jenő Schück, President of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council, recalled the greatness of Rabbenu Moshe Teitelbaum, who founded the Teitelbaum Dynasty. The cemetery service was attended by hundreds of believers from home and abroad.” 1 August 1966, 6. *Új Élet*. (Hungarian.)

<sup>38</sup> In 1967, on the feast of the birth and death of Moses (17 February of that year), a large number of believers came to Nagykálló on pilgrimage to place their “prayer quilt” on the coffin in the tomb. A large number of people from Debrecen took part, and many “believers from home and abroad” visited the tomb of the great rabbi, “which is in perfect condition”. 15 March 1967, 6. *Új Élet*. In 1968 (7 March), a similar large number of people came to the Jewish community on the occasion of the Jewish holiday. 1 April 1968, 2. *Új Élet*. (Hungarian.)

<sup>39</sup> 15 May, 1968, 4. *Új Élet*. Két híres rabbi emlékezete. (A memoir of two famous rabbis.) The pilgrimage on 3 May fell on 1 May that year. (Hungarian.)

<sup>40</sup> A siyum or “conclusion” is the completion of some Torah, Mishna/Talmudic portion, usually followed by a small ceremony.

foreign mission had granted entry permits to all of them, and that the pilgrims had visited Bodrogkeresztúr, Olaszliszka and Nagykálló.<sup>41</sup>

It is notable not only that the news of these changes was still published only to a narrow, sectarian public, and there only buried at the end of the news reports, but also that the Sátoraljaújhely municipality, in May 1968, expropriated the old Jewish cemetery, under the orders of the parish and its president, Lipót Klein. At the same time, it agreed—precisely in view of the pilgrimages—that the tomb of Rabbi Mose Teitelbaum (together with the great rabbis who rested next to him and the building that formed the entrance to the cemetery) should remain in its original form, and so they were removed.<sup>42</sup> The costs of the expropriation, the exhumation and the fence to be erected at the boundary were borne by the city.

In any case, it can be said with certainty that there was a cautious opening on the part of the public authorities, which represented a step forward after the reticence of the previous decade (especially the early 1950s). The administrative forces of the state dealing with the Jewish religion slowly realized that the representatives of foreign Orthodoxy (which included the explicitly anti-Zionist Hasidic Rebbe of Satmar and his followers), who considered the care of rabbinical graves important, were on the one hand apolitical in Hungarian affairs, and therefore not dangerous to the state power, while on the other hand their presence could be important from a tourism/economic point of view and could generate revenue for the Hungarian economy. This, in turn, brought an aspect of economic rationality into a previously irrational world, and was also in accord with the factors justifying the “openness” of the Kádár regime.

### State Security Intervenes

Our first sources on the Hungarian state security surveillance of visitors to the tombs of the Miracle Rabbis date back to 1969. Presumably, the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, the termination of diplomatic relations and the Soviet-style anti-Zionist campaign of that time motivated the Hungarian authorities’ efforts, since no state security documents relating to this could be found before 1969. Our opinion is confirmed by the fact that the evaluation report written in 1973 (and to be detailed later), published by Department III/II of the Borsod County Police Headquarters, dates the first pilgrimage to Bodrogkeresztúr to 1969, although these occasions, which were also visited by foreigners, had begun years earlier, according to the semi-state and therefore state-controlled Jewish community press. All this suggests that state security was not previously curious about these pilgrimages, but when it noticed their presence (through surveillance), it did not evaluate the phenomenon and the religious practice

<sup>41</sup> 25 July 1968 MAOIH Archives, Schück bequest.

<sup>42</sup> 8 May, 1968. Jelentés a sátoraljaújhelyi régi temető exhumálása tárgyában. (Report on the exhumation of the old cemetery in Sátoraljaújhely). (Probably written by Jenő Schück to Géza Seifert, president of the MIOK). Schück “went out” to the site and submitted the plans.



as an independent phenomenon, but instead integrated it into the current state security-political trend.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, this surveillance of the tomb of the Miracle Rabbis was not a separate issue for state security, but part of a series of observations carried out by the Borsod state security officers of certain members of the Jewish community in Miskolc, including Chief Rabbi Jenő Schück. Alongside them, the main target was a planned Jewish youth club, an idea which the political police did not like very much, as it would have taken Jewish life outside the controllable walls of the synagogue. This was the reason why reports on visits to the tomb of the Miracle Rabbis have survived at all, because there were no such reports in the state security material from other counties.

The observations that were made in this case, codenamed “The Helpers” (“Segélyezők”), continued until the mid-1970s and basically focused on the situation in Borsod.<sup>44</sup> Investigations against various “Zionists” initially concerned the religious community circles and a university lecturer in Miskolc, but later extended to other individuals. The Borsod police reports also made clear reference to the visit of Israeli diplomats (Ambassador David Giladi and Assistant Diplomat Eytan Bentsur) to Miskolc in January 1967, an event which had already been closely followed.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the State Security service noted that the embassy visitors were discussing the establishment of a kosher factory kitchen in Miskolc by the Jewish community, which was to attract foreign funding.<sup>46</sup> However, in the light of subsequent events, this visit took on a different meaning, as the county’s state security was investigating Zionists, which meant that any reference to anything that was or could have been connected with Israel became suspicious.<sup>47</sup> As the rabbinical sites attracted foreign visitors and the Jewish state’s affairs were discussed among the visitors, the accusations of Zionism were soon “confirmed” and slowly spread to other counties.<sup>48</sup>

In June 1969, a summary report on the situation in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County was published, which described how the Zionist movement should also be

<sup>43</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1. 26 February 1973 Értékelő jelentés (Evaluation report). Borsod County Police Headquarters III/II.

<sup>44</sup> Here I have also used an earlier and unpublished paper by historian Bence Csátri, entitled *Szemelvények a magyarországi zsidóság pártállami történetéből* (“Sections from the History of the Hungarian Jews during the One-Party-State”), which the author made available to me. Thanks for it.

<sup>45</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-13612.

<sup>46</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1. Report of agent “Tivadar Galambos” fn. of 26 January 1967. Borsod County Police Headquarters III/II-a. Subdepartment.

<sup>47</sup> When Israeli diplomats Menashe Ben Slomo and Yosef Givol and their wives stayed at the Avas Hotel in Miskolc on 27–28 March 1959, they even invoked the 3/E rule (wiretapping). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11421. 2 April 1959 Report of the Political Investigation Department of the Police Headquarters of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County (Miskolc).

<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, state security was also conducting surveillance in Budapest. In addition to monitoring some Jewish leaders (Sándor Scheiber, Mihály Borsa) and the Jewish community leadership, a group of young Jews was also kept under surveillance and a file was kept on them under the title “Jubilálók” (“Jubilarians”). The main purpose of the “Keddisták” (“Tuesdayists”) group (they met on Tuesdays in the Moszkva Restaurant in Budapest) was to meet and find a partner. See Kovács 2003

taken into consideration in the countryside (i.e. outside Budapest). The main suspicious activity it identified was that—they claimed—in 1967 the Israeli embassy in Budapest (while it existed) was making more and more trips to Miskolc (which was not true in this form), bringing propaganda material and conducting hostile activities at community meetings—wearing religious uniforms. In addition, the community leaders met several times with the leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church and made hostile statements. The 1969 Bodrogkeresztúr yearbook and the foreign rabbis who attended were already under surveillance. In the course of the investigation, listening devices were installed in the homes or workplaces of several people, including Rabbi Schück.

While *Új Élet* continued to report on the pilgrimages in the early 1970s—albeit in short news items and on its back pages—and foreign (mainly American) citizens who went on them travelled legally to Hungary, reading the state security documents of Borsod County reveals a completely different world, as if we had stepped back in time. The summary report written on 26 February 1973 (and already quoted) observed, in connection with Bodrogkeresztúr, that “the foreign rabbis who appeared there gave lectures of a political nature with a hostile purpose to the Jewish persons attending the lectures”. According to the evaluator, they used to meet at Frida Winkler’s apartment (reported by *Új Élet*) and many of them listened to the Hungarian language broadcasts of Israeli radio.<sup>49</sup> On 7 March, 1973, the Borsod operatives reported that a large-scale “Israelite” gathering was being prepared in Bodrogkeresztúr and Nagykálló, informing the Szabolcs-Szatmár County Police Headquarters separately about the latter meeting, since the settlement was in their territory.<sup>50</sup> The tone was one of alarm and panic: “Similar gatherings were held in previous years in the village of Bodrogkeresztúr in our county, where, under the guise of a religious gathering, the American and British citizens attending the gathering gave hostile anti-Soviet lectures, which were intended to incite opposition to the People’s Republic. They praised Israel’s military and economic superiority, and then asked the Hungarian citizens who attended to defect to Israel and organize their defection. We ask for the organization of an inspection, if possible, especially because several persons from our district who are active enemies of Zionism will be attending, and we are keeping them under careful processing.”<sup>51</sup>

On 15 March, an agent reported on the pilgrimage to Nagykálló on 11 March and the dinner of the Miskolc Jewish community. In this report also the observation of the pilgrimage was a side issue, the main focus being on the entry of Hungarian citizens into Israel, or vice versa, the “infiltration” of Israelis and Americans into Hungary. One quite bizarre detail in the agent’s report is when the religious leaders under observation by the state security service (mainly Chief Rabbi Schück) thank the construction department of the City Council, the chief engineer and the Ministry

<sup>49</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1. 26 February 1973 Evaluation report, Borsod County Police Headquarters III/II. O.

<sup>50</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1. 7 March 1973 Borsod County Police Headquarters to the Head of Szabolcs-Szatmár County Police Headquarters.

<sup>51</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

of Construction itself for the demolition of the cemetery in Hejőcsaba (a part of the city of Miskolc). The agent crossing over into another county, described quite precisely the location of the pilgrimage to (Nagy)Kálló and the dramaturgy of the pilgrimage itself. As he put it, the “tomb is in the town, there is a building in a courtyard enclosed by a concrete fence, which has a cellar entrance, and the tomb is in the cellar, the room can accommodate 20–30 people at a time, where they light candles and pray, there is no organized gathering, the cars come and go...”<sup>52</sup> According to the agent, the pilgrimage had already started a week earlier, and on 8 October a group of 40 Americans arrived, who came by “special (chartered) plane” to Budapest and from there by bus to Nagykálló. The group was accompanied by the former Rabbi of Pápa, who lived in the United States. Rabbi Schück from Miskolc and several other community leaders from Miskolc arrived with the group.

The Jewish press, as if living in another, normal universe, reported over the years (in the usual marginalized places, of course) on the Jewish religious and historical attachment to these places. In 1970, László Szilágyi-Windt’s book, *The Tzadik of Kálló, The History of the Jews of Nagykálló* (1960, Tel Aviv) was published in Hebrew, (which had been published in Hungarian earlier), with a foreword by Sándor Scheiber, and this was reported in *Új Élet*.<sup>53</sup> In 1971, the pilgrimage of the people of Debrecen to Nagykálló (zayin adar) was reported.<sup>54</sup> The latter was highlighted in the paper and the deceased rabbi was described as a ‘great tzadik’.<sup>55</sup> The pilgrimage was also held in 1973, and the usual Zayin Adar report also states that the tomb of the famous rabbi of Nagykálló had been “completely restored” by the MJIC presidency.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, according to the report, the grave was visited by pilgrims from the Debrecen community and “from all parts of the country.” Foreign participants were not mentioned in the coverage this time.

While the extremely limited Jewish press reports painted a picture of a kind of stagnant and peaceful situation, the Department III/II of the Szatmár County Police Headquarters also reported to the Borsod authorities on the pilgrimage of 11 March 1973.<sup>57</sup> The report described how the visit to the rabbinical tombs in Nagykálló took place in the morning, how the guests came in cars, one car holding 3–4 people, mostly men. No one came in a foreign car, although there were foreigners in cars with Hungarian license plates.

The place of origin of the cars and the identity of the owners suggests that the pilgrimages (if they were not foreign) were made by local Jews living in the vicinity of the pilgrimage sites.

Movement was also observed the following day, and according to an (earlier) record, “on 3 and 8 March 1973, a panoramic bus transported tourists to the

<sup>52</sup> 16 March 1973. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

<sup>53</sup> 1 September 1970, 2. *Új Élet*. Magyar-zsidó történelmi munkák külföldön (Hungarian-Jewish historical works abroad.).

<sup>54</sup> 1 April 1971. 6. *Új Élet*. Zájjin Ádár.

<sup>55</sup> 1 March 1972, 3. *Új Élet*. Zájjin Ádár ünnepek. (Zayin Adar celebrations).

<sup>56</sup> 1 April 1973, 2. *Új Élet*. Zájjin Ádár.

<sup>57</sup> 21 March 1973 Szabolcs-Szatmár County Police Headquarters III/II. reports to the Head of Borsod County Police Headquarters III/II. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

Holy Rabbi's tomb." The police report, which did not name agents, described the pilgrims' behavior in detail: they spent a very short time at the site, "took care of what was necessary for the service in 5–10 min" and drove off in the direction of Nyíregyháza. The police "discovered" a conspiracy in the local confectioner's shop, where most of them briefly stopped. This also shows the paranoid thinking of the Hungarian state security, the absurdity of the situation, the "making an issue" of normal situations.

The summary report of 26 February 1973 (compiled by Department III/II of the Borsod County Police Headquarters), which has been mentioned several times already above, is also interesting in that it clearly shows the context in which the visit to the graves of the Miracle Rabbis (the graves of Bodrogkeresztúr and Nagykálló) became matters of interest for state security, after the observations and information gathering of the previous years.<sup>58</sup> Chief Rabbi Schück is described as the rabbi of the Israeli embassy, who was in contact with the embassy's "leading diplomats and intelligence officers". The information presented by the Borsod state security was not true: Schück was not a "rabbi" of the diplomatic corps. Moreover, one of the Israeli diplomats, Commercial Attaché Akavia Hanan, had previously (1966) had serious conflicts with Schück. Hanan had warned Schück against exporting Jewish prayer and ritual objects to Transcarpathia (Kárpátalja), which was on the territory of the Soviet Union, fearing that they might be discovered at the Soviet border and cause inconvenience to the "consignors". This was seen by the rabbi as interference and he did not take it kindly.<sup>59</sup> In the report, "Schreiber" (actually Professor Sándor Scheiber) was also named as "the controller." As mentioned above, Chief Rabbi Schück—because he was dealing with Jewish youth in Miskolc—was placed under Order 3/E (room wiretapping), as it was suspected that he was assisting in the "defection" of young people to Israel. The Miskolc "group" was known to have been in contact with foreign Zionists, mainly from Vienna, and with HIAS<sup>60</sup> (the local Israeli branch of the organization). In this connection, a pilgrimage to Bodrogkeresztúr, also attended by foreign rabbis, was recorded, during which hostile lectures were given to "incite" Zionism and anti-Sovietism:

Many people also listen to Israeli radio in Hungarian. There are verified reports that in recent years a youth camp has been set up in Yugoslavia to provide a holiday for Jewish young people from socialist countries." "This camp is maintained by the Israeli authorities with funding from the American Zionist agencies, and the camp residents are provided with a program."<sup>61</sup>

The state security service's text reveals their concern that "the legal proof of operationally proven hostile activity is not possible or is difficult to obtain. At this time,

<sup>58</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

<sup>59</sup> Report of 28 October 1966. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-13610.

<sup>60</sup> HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society): an American Jewish non-profit organisation that helps Jewish refugees of East-Europe mainly..

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

they are wary of any activity that could lead to criminal prosecution.”<sup>62</sup> K-checks (postal mail) were also used to check up on the “group.”

A report on the pilgrimage to Bodrogkeresztúr on 6 May 1973 was prepared by the Borsod County Police Headquarters, Department III/II, based on the report of the above-mentioned agent.<sup>63</sup> The agent’s task was specifically to report on the Bodrogkeresztúr participants and “their conversation”. The report again indicated that many people were present, including a rabbi from the United States named Grósz and his family. The report notes that “many people did not come from the US because it was a Saturday before and they could not travel. Rabbi Grosz had left the Thursday before.”<sup>64</sup> Others came from Budapest, Nyíregyháza, Debrecen, Sátoraljaújhely, Tokaj, Kisvárda and Miskolc, neighboring cities. The agent (“Pigeon”) was not so much interested in the religious context of the visit as in the political “information” that could be extracted. He got into a conversation with Rabbi Grósz (who had probably “turned up” in 1969), who told him how wealthy American Jews were supporting Israel, building factories in the Jewish state, investing there, and thus “making Zionism work.” Grósz, for example, mentioned that the main topic of US Secretary of State Kissinger’s visit to Moscow would be the emigration of Jews from the socialist countries to Israel. He also talked about the political differences between the Sephardic religious party and Mapai in Israel:

Grósz also said that in Israel there is a great conflict between the Sephardic religious party and the MAPAJ Labour Party and the ruling party over non-observance of religion, in that members of the religious party are not subject to compulsory military service, only on a voluntary basis, but they are also given places to serve so that they can keep the Sabbath and other religious holidays at home.<sup>65</sup>

“Galambos” also discussed the visit to the rabbi’s grave: “After a short talk, the people went up to the cemetery on the hill, to the rabbi’s grave, and prayed there. There were about 40 cars during my stay, but they came from all over the country throughout the day.”<sup>66</sup>

The report then goes on to discuss the family connections and travels of many of those present, which is not as relevant to our topic. Agent “Tivadar Galambos” was diligent in recording who had sent money to a relative in Israel or who wished to visit his son in Israel. The report reveals not only what the state security agent was looking out for, but also the situation of the remaining Jews in northeastern Hungary. The picture he painted showed the presence of a core of religious and mainly elderly Jews (keeping a kosher household and the Sabbath<sup>67</sup>), and of a related stratum who

<sup>62</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

<sup>63</sup> 17 May 1973. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1..

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1. It is not clear which party Grósz considered ‘Sephardic religious’ and whether he did not mean the National Religious Party. The seventh Knesset (1969–1973) was very stable compared to the others, and Golda Meir was the head of the government of national unity.

<sup>66</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

<sup>67</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

were supportive (paying religious taxes, for example), but who did not observe the obligatory and expected elements of religious practice.<sup>68</sup> Several had relatives living in Israel, the United States and elsewhere, and many wanted to contact these relatives.<sup>69</sup> Many knew each other, and the contacts between those who remained extended to the management of marriages.<sup>70</sup> The techniques for getting money out to relatives was varied (collecting “black” currency in Hungary, then sending it to Israel by post via local citizens in Vienna and London). The main figure of the planned Jewish youth club in Miskolc (Anikó Farkas) was also found, but this generation was no longer linked to Judaism through religion.

In their assessment, the Borsod police found that the agent had obtained “valuable” information about the Bodrogkeresztúr “gathering” and “the activities of the three US travellers who had been here in the past year and were engaged in active enemy propaganda activities.”<sup>71</sup> These three rabbis (Israel Rosenbaum, Alexander Landau and Ludovic Taub) were proposed for inclusion on the banned list. It was also made clear that both the entrants and the Hungarian citizens present “have in several cases emerged as engaging in Zionist activities.”<sup>72</sup>

The “Helpers” dossier was closed in 1975, and no further information is available on the surveillance of visitors to the tomb of the Miracle Rabbis. However, it is clear from the Jewish press and archival sources that the pilgrimages continued in the same way. There are records of this from 1974 and from 1976–1977.<sup>73</sup> In 1974, an anonymous journalist of *Új Élet* reported that the MIOK presidency had “last year repaired” the tomb in (Nagy)Kálló.<sup>74</sup> The news from Kálló in 1974 finds an echo in the 1976 report on Bodrogkeresztúr, where, according to the chronicler, “there were believers from home and abroad present” during Reb Sáje Steiner’s year.<sup>75</sup> The post-prayer shiur was organized by Frida Winkler, an important local figure, who was also under surveillance by state security, and who (it is said) suffered no serious reprisals. In 1977, a Debrecen-related article about the pilgrimage to Nagykálló was published in the Jewish newspaper.<sup>76</sup> From 1979 onwards, in parallel with Hungary’s attempts to establish stronger ties with the West, the issue took on a new dimension:

<sup>68</sup> “László Kluger, the president of the Kárpitos Cooperative, considers himself a good Jew, rarely goes to temple (sic), does not attend functions, but is happy to donate and pay congregation tax when needed. His wife is involved in the work of the Women’s Association. Before 1945 he was a conscript in Soviet territory.” ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-15943/1.

<sup>69</sup> László Gellért was a resident of Mezőcsát. *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> On 1 and 3 March, 1974, a “large number” of believers from Debrecen and “distant lands” appeared in Nagykálló at the “great rabbi’s tomb” on zayin adarkor. 15 March 1974, 4. *Új Élet*. (Celebrations of Adar Zayin).

<sup>74</sup> 15 March 1974. 4. *Új Élet*. Zájín Ádár ünnepségek. (Zayin Adar celebrations.) (Hungarian.).

<sup>75</sup> 15 May 1976. 6. *Új Élet*. Hírek (News.) (Hungarian.).

<sup>76</sup> The Debrecen community celebrated the anniversary of Moses’ birth and death. “Previously, several members of the community had made a pilgrimage to Nagykálló” to the grave of the Kálló cadet, whose year is on the anniversary of the Zayin. 1 April 1977, 6 *Új Élet*. (Celebrations of Zayin Adar). (Hungarian.).

Zvi Kesztenbaum, an influential Satmar Hasid of Hungarian origin (born in 1922 in Újfehértó) and well connected with American political circles, paid a personal visit to the MIOK leadership and sought to organize a collection to try to raise the profile of the rabbinical graves and Jewish graves and cemeteries in the countryside in general.<sup>77</sup> Kesztenbaum, whose organisation had become known as the Society for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries by the mid-1980s, accompanied the congregation of Nagykálló in Jerusalem to Nagykálló on 11 March 1984, and two days earlier had a meeting with MIOK General Secretary Dr Gézáné Seifert and MIOK Vice-President Lajos Bakos about the renovation of the cemetery in Sátoraljaújhely.<sup>78</sup>

The 1980s saw a gradual opening up: in October 1987, Imre Miklós, President of the ÁEH, visited the new Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Moses Teitelbaum (he was the cousin of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum) in the United States and invited him to Hungary. The Rabbi accepted the invitation, then came to Hungary for a three-day visit in November 1988, was received by Károly Grósz, President of the Council of Ministers, on 14 November 1988.<sup>79</sup> Teitelbaum was by then President of the Orthodox Rabbinical Congress of the USA and Canada, and the contacts with him also helped to re-align the Hungarian political elite's foreign relations.

## Summary

Despite living under a communist dictatorship, a small group of Jews in Hungary kept up their customs and visited (mainly locally) the graves of the great rabbis, who were known in popular tradition as the miracle rabbis. There was also the constant presence (certainly from the second half of the 1960s onwards) of foreign pilgrims, mainly American Hasidim, who were legally admitted (with visas). During these visits, the pilgrims always visited several tombs of the Miracle Rabbis, satisfying the “demands” of religious tourism. The official Jewish representation, which was largely loyal to the Kádár regime, perceived the challenges and had the tomb at Nagykálló renovated in the 1960s. The Orthodox Chief Rabbi Schück's particular diplomatic experiment went further, and he wanted to invite the world-renowned leader of the Hasidic community in Satmar, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (i.e. the Satmar Rebbe), to Hungary, and to use the visit for his own religious policy purposes. Although this attempt eventually faltered for reasons that remain unclear, it was a clear indication that non-political economic and religious diplomacy had entered the Kádár era.

Initially, the primary purpose of the pilgrimages was to visit the burial sites of Hasidic rabbis, resulting in the participation of mostly Orthodox Jews. Despite the

<sup>77</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-c ÁEH Box 89. 551 39–192. 2 February 1979.

<sup>78</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-c ÁEH Box 89. Memorandum. March 9, 1984. Kesztenbaum was also Vice-Chairman of the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad in the second half of the 1980s.

<sup>79</sup> 15 November 1988 3. Népszabadság.



anti-religious pressure exerted by the state, the majority of Hungarian Jews adhered to Neology and remained unaffected. A significant proportion of the Neologues refrained from visiting the tombs of the Miracle Rabbis due to their perceived orthodoxy, which was incongruent with the prevailing beliefs of the Neologue majority. Nonetheless, the Neologue leaders of the Hungarian Jewish community, who were compelled to form a unified organization, sporadically undertook visits to these sites and coordinated efforts for their restoration. The worldview and religious behaviors linked with this particular religious practice were significantly divergent from their own worldview.

What can be said about the different attitudes, conflicts of interests and values of the central and local authorities of the period is that it is a matter for comparative religious history, so that it could be examined to what extent this case differed from other cases of religious excommunication, what regional and regional differences there were, and to what extent the customary order of pilgrimages was influenced by the world of existing socialism.<sup>80</sup>

It was not the practice of religious observance alone that attracted the interest of the political police. Rather, according to the reports, the anti-Zionist wave that swept through Eastern European countries after 1967 was the trigger for official action, during which the local forces of state security—mainly the officers of the Borsod County State Security, but also those of Szabolcs-Szatmár County—observed (especially in 1973) Jewish pilgrims from Nagykálló and Bodrogkeresztúr, both in Hungary and abroad. At the same time, however, their harassment was not directed against visits to the rabbis' graves as such, but only to monitoring foreign and Hungarian visitors and to preventing the self-organization of local Jews outside the synagogue, under the pretext of fighting Zionism.

What is certain is that, apart from the excesses of the state security imagination of the otherwise conservative Borsod and Szabolcs counties, the entry of pious pilgrims did not affect the unspoken but very real consensus of the Kádár era in Socialist Hungary.

## Glossary

Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal (State

Office for Church Affairs) A body set up for the implementation of agreements between the Hungarian state and Churches, and for the performance of the state's administrative duties in relation to religions. The affairs of each religion were

<sup>80</sup> For example, Catholic cases were also processed. See e.g. Varga 2014; Csibi-Varga 2015. For more details on the Jásdi case, see Horváth 2018. These cases were brought to my attention by Éva Petrás, and I thank her for her help.

handled by separate departments or sub-departments. It functioned between 1951 and 1989

Államvédelmi Hatóság

(State Protection Authority)

It was the secret police of the People's Republic of Hungary between 1945 and 1956. It was dissolved in 1956 than succeeded by the Ministry of Internal Affairs III

Budapesti Izraelita Hitközség/

BIH/Budapest Israelite Community

Has a history dating back to the eighteenth century, to the founding of the Israelite Community of Óbuda. In 1793, the Pesti Israelite Community became independent from the Óbuda Israelite Community and soon developed into the largest and richest Jewish community in Hungary and by the end of the nineteenth century in Europe and the world. At one time, about 25%, or a quarter, of the population of Pest was of Jewish origin. In 1944, following the Nazi occupation, it was replaced by the Jewish Council, and was re-established in 1945. In 1950, the Israelite Community of Pest was merged with the Israelite Community of Buda and the Israelite Community of Óbuda under the name of the "Israelite Community of Budapest" and then came under close state supervision

MIOK (Magyar Izraeliták

Országos Képviselete)

In 1950, the communist regime forcibly merged all Jewish denominations and communities under a single umbrella organization, the MIOK (National Representation of Hungarian Israelites). The MIOK was also the representative body of the Jewish communities until 1991

János Kádár (1912–1989)

Hungarian, Communist politician and the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party, a position he held for 32 years. He was a member of the illegal Communist Youth organization (KIMSZ), then the Communist Party. After World War 2 he made a career serving as Interior Minister from 1948 to 1950. Later he was imprisoned by the government of Mátyás Rákosi, then released in 1954. After having taken part in the revolutionary Imre Nagy's government, he broke with them. After the fall of the Revolution he was selected to lead Hungary. He was succeeded by Károly Grósz as General Secretary on 22 May 1988

Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt  
(Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party)

The ruling Marxist-Leninist Party  
of People's Republic of Hungary  
between 1956 and 1989

*Új Élet* Official Jewish newspaper after 1945, which is still published under this title. It was always in the hands of the Jewish community (Neologue) leadership. It was a weekly until 1957 and has been a biweekly since

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