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Across the Iron Curtain: Hungarian Jewish Refugees in Austria, 1945-1951

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Across the Iron Curtain

Hungarian Jewish Refugees in Austria, 1945-1951

Rebekah Klein-Pejšová, History
Library Scholars Grant Presentation
Across the Iron Curtain

- Project examines the efforts of Jews remaining inside Cold War era Eastern Bloc countries to maintain contact with relatives, friends, and international Jewish organizations outside of it and their implications for Jewish/state relations.

- Study organized around tensions between these efforts and perceptions of the Jews as an a priori disloyal element in postwar East Bloc countries (esp. Hungary and Czechoslovakia).
Immediate Postwar Context

- Population displacement as crucial first step
- Materials pertain to care, accommodation, emigration, employment; the social, political, and religious life of Jewish DPs, and postwar antisemitism
- YIVO obtained materials between 1946-1960, gathered by local YIVO “Sammlers”
The borders were redrawn and the Allied occupation zones defined in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Locations of the Major Jewish DP Camps and Centers in the “DP Countries”: Germany, Austria, and Italy, by zone of occupation, 1945-1946.

Sources and Research

• Focus on DPs Camps and Centers in Austria collection
• Plus HIAS/HICEM France IV: materials from main European office of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society
• Prepared paper for “The Holocaust in Hungary: 70 Years Later” international conference at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, March 19, 2014
• Experience of Hungarian Jewish DPs in Austria & contact with relatives and friends in Hungary?
• Surprise Find: The Letters!!
Relatives and friends sent dozens letters addressed to Jewish DPs at Enns Green Shelter, lager number 106, Upper Austria, which remained undelivered.

YIVO, RG 294.4, folders 448-452
The Letter to Enns

- Enns as fixed point in this story of Hungarian Jews’ attempts to map and travel paths of adaptation to their shattered world as the Iron Curtain drew down.

- Key findings:
  - Enns as central gathering point for Hungarian-speaking Jewish refugees in Austrian DP camp system
  - Significance of “Jewish” classification as rupture in Hungarian Jewish self-identification experience
  - Uncovering survivor voices in the letters: excerpts
Jewish DPs are gathered at the entrance to the office of the camp commander at the Enns displaced persons camp.

Photo #38359, USHMM
Alexander Schaechter (center) meets with Jewish DPs as they prepare for their departure from the Enns displaced persons camp.

Photo #38358, USHMM