

The Restitution and Compensation of Holocaust Survivors in Pest County, 1945–1989

Summary

The Hungarian Jewish population suffered from a gradual deprivation of rights from the end of the 1930s, during which first their jobs and careers, then their real estates were “Aryanized”. After the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, the persecution escalated. Within only a couple of months, the bulk of the Jewish population was locked up in ghettos and deported, mainly to Auschwitz-Birkenau. More than half a million Hungarian Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. Those who survived, faced a great variety of difficulties: they lost most of their relatives, they returned from the camps with illnesses, their houses had been robbed or non-Jews had moved into them and when the survivors tried to re-establish their lives, they faced the hostility of those non-Jews who had profited from their persecution. These issues affected the lives of the survivors on the long term – especially since the Hungarian state did not initiate a restitution operation.

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the post-war situation of the Jewish survivors in Pest County in light of the restitution and compensation: which institutions were responsible for handling Jewish property, what kind of efforts were made by the survivors to get back their property/inheritance or to get compensation, how did the interactions of Jews, non-Jews, authorities influence the fate of valuables? What kind of damages inflicted on the Jews were compensated for? Through microhistorical case studies, this dissertation explores two historical periods (the post-war years of 1945–1948 and 1948–1989, the time of state socialism) and four major stages of restitution and compensation (the first attempts made by survivors to get back their property; the functioning of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property and that of the National Jewish Restitution Fund, as well as compensation coming from West Germany).