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Life between Memory and Hope
The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany

Zeev W. Mankowitz tells the remarkable story of the 250,000 survivors of the Holocaust who converged on the American Zone of Occupied Germany from 1945 to 1948. They envisaged themselves as the living bridge between destruction and rebirth, the last remnants of a world destroyed and the active agents of its return to life. Much of what has been written to date looks at the Surviving Remnant through the eyes of others and thus has often failed to disclose the tragic complexity of their lives together with their remarkable political and social achievements. Despite the fact that they had lost everyone and everything, they got on with their lives, they married, had children and worked for a better future. They did not surrender to the deformities of suffering and managed to preserve their humanity intact. Using largely inaccessible archival material, Mankowitz gives a moving and sensitive account of this neglected area in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.

ZEEV W. MANKOWITZ is a senior lecturer at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
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Life between Memory and Hope

*The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*

Zeev W. Mankowitz

*Hebrew University of Jerusalem*
In loving memory of Gene
and to our children Yonit and Noam,
the light of my life
Contents

Plates viii
Acknowledgments ix
Abbreviations and note on spelling and dates xi

Introduction 1

1 The occupation of Germany and the survivors: an overview 11

2 The formation of She’erith Hapleitah: November 1944 – July 1945 24

3 She’erith Hapleitah enters the international arena: July–October 1945 52

4 Hopes of Zion: September 1945 – January 1946 69

5 In search of a new politics: unity versus division 88

6 The Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in Bavaria 101

7 The politics of education 131

8 Two voices from Landsberg: Rudolf Valsonok and Samuel Gringauz 161

9 Destruction and remembrance 192

10 The survivors confront Germany 226

11 She’erith Hapleitah towards 1947 263

Concluding remarks 285

Bibliography 304
Index 318
Plates

1  The anguish of liberation, Dachau, April 1945  
2  Buchenwald after liberation – the first Sabbath prayers  
3  A Polish repatriate family in Occupied Germany c. late 1946  
4  Sarah Robinson feeding her daughter Alice, Zeilsheim  
5  Mothers and children in Zeilsheim  
6  Teaching Hebrew to the young  
7  The Kibbutz Buchenwald Agricultural Training Farm  
   in Geringshof  
8  Elections for the Camp Committee in Landsberg  
9  A political protest march  
10  Learning a new trade, preparing for the future  
11  Mr. Griebler prepares to set sail for Palestine, 1947  

page 15  
27  
107  
132  
133  
134  
146  
171  
271  
277  
295
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My association with the International Center for Advanced Studies at Yad Vashem in 1999 allowed me to reenter the world of research while a Koerner Visiting Fellowship at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies granted me a year of friendly support and productive peace midst the sylvan beauty of Yarnton Manor. The Melton Center for Jewish Education, my academic home in the Hebrew University, is justifiably known for the intellectual ferment and generous collegiality that I have been fortunate enough to share. I owe a special vote of thanks to my friend and mentor Michael Rosenak, to Carmen Sharon, the Administrative Director, whose friendship and concern went far beyond the call of duty, and Vivienne Burstein who graciously granted me academic assistance every step of the way. I should also like to acknowledge the
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Finally I wish to thank my wife Bella who, when all was dark, gave me the loving care that helped me start anew.
## Abbreviations and note on spelling and dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AACI</td>
<td>Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJDC</td>
<td>American Joint Distribution Committee (often shortened to JDC or, simply, the Joint), the charitable arm of American Jews to needy communities overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AZA</td>
<td>American Zionist Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDPX</td>
<td>Combined Displaced Persons Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZA</td>
<td>Central Zionist Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Displaced person, stateless as a result of the dislocations of the Second World War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLK</td>
<td>Fun Letstn Khurbn (From the Recent Destruction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRUS</td>
<td>Foreign Relations of the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHA</td>
<td>Hashomer Hatzair Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDF</td>
<td>Israel Defence Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMT</td>
<td>International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLT</td>
<td>Landsberger Lager Tsaytung (in the original Polish transliteration ‘Caitung’), the influential weekly of the Landsberg DP camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Archives, Washington DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHD</td>
<td>Oral History Department of the Institute for Contemporary Jewry, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSE</td>
<td>L’Oeuvre de Secour aux Enfants, a leading French–Jewish philanthropic organization focusing on the health needs of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Public Records Office, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rec.A-A</td>
<td>Records of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHAEF</td>
<td>Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THK</td>
<td>Tsentraler Historisher Komisiye, Central Historical Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNRRA</td>
<td>United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UZO</td>
<td>United Zionist Organization in Bavaria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
YIVO The well-known Yiddish Institute for Jewish Research that was transferred from Vilna, Lithuania, to New York in 1939

YSA Yad Vashem Archive

YT Yiddishe Tsaytung that replaced the Landsberger Lager Tsaytung

ZK Zentral komitet fun di bafreite yidn in datyshland – the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in Germany (later changed to ‘in Bavaria’)

Note on spelling and dates

She’erith Hapleitah – the Surviving Remnant has been variously transliterated and I have retained the variant forms that appear in the diverse sources I have used.

In the second half of the 1940s the accepted plural acronym for Displaced Persons was DP’s which I have retained when quoting. Elsewhere I prefer the contemporary usage – DPs.

I have used the European practice of day/month/year throughout.
Introduction

This study sets out to examine the initial responses of Holocaust survivors to the tragedy that overtook them. It focuses on the history of She’erith Hapleith — the Surviving Remnant — in the American Zone of Occupied Germany which, despite its inherent limitations as a group in transit, rose to temporary prominence in the immediate post-war years. While the term She’erith Hapleith refers to all surviving Jews in Europe, it designates most particularly those who converged on Germany between 1945 and 1949.

As the impending defeat of Nazi Germany grew closer and the hope of possible liberation more tangible, the thoughts of the concentration camp inmates in Germany increasingly turned to the fate of those who would be lucky enough to survive. It is in this context that the term She’erith Hapleith, the biblical concept of the saved or surviving remnant, comes to describe those who would survive to see the allied victory. Apparently the first recorded reference to She’erith Hapleith appears in the Channukah 5705 (November–December 1944) number of Nitzotz (The Spark), the underground organ of the Irgun Brith Zion in the Kovno Ghetto, which began to appear in Kaufering, a sub-camp of Dachau, to which the last remnants of the Ghetto had been deported five months earlier. In the five extant issues of the paper (two were lost) the term She’erith Hapleith is freely used to describe those who would hopefully survive, suggesting that it was already an integral part of shared language in Kaufering even before Nitzotz was reissued. In certain cases the term refers to survivors throughout Europe and in others is restricted to those who would remain alive in Bavaria; sometimes the focus was on physical survival but at other times it was bound up with both personal survival and the rebirth of Jewish life in Palestine, a task for which they, “the generation of the desert,” needed to steel themselves.¹ With liberation this multivalent notion of She’erith Hapleith gained immediate acceptance and wide

¹ See “D’var hamifkada” (A word from headquarters), Nitzotz, no.3(38) (Channukah 5705 – November 1944): 1.
currency. Indeed, when the young American chaplain, Rabbi Abraham
Klausner, found himself in Dachau towards the end of May 1945 and
began to help the liberated in their desperate search for family, the first
in a number of volumes containing the names of thousands of survivors
in Bavaria was entitled Shearit Hapletah.2 From 1943 the leadership of
Palestinian Jewry also, quite independently, began to refer to those who
would hopefully survive as Sh’erith Hapleitah.3

The earliest mention of the term appears in Genesis 32:9 when Jacob,
who was greatly distressed about his imminent reunion with Esau after
so many years of estrangement, divided his people and property into two
camps saying: “If Esau come to the one camp and smite it, then the
camp [hanish’ar lifleitah] which is left shall escape.” Already this enun-
ciates in a preliminary way the themes of danger, destruction and the
survival of a remnant that carries the promise of the future. The redemp-
tive theme becomes central to Isaiah’s usage as can be seen in his prophecy
to Hizqiyyahu regarding Sanheriv, King of Ashur: “And the remnant that
is escaped of the house of Yehuda shall yet again take root downwards,
and bear fruit upwards. For out of Jerusalem shall go [She´erith Upleitah]
a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Ziyyon”(Second Book of
Kings 19:30–31). In First Chronicles 4:43 “And they smote the remnant
of Amalek who had escaped [She´erith Hapleitah le-Amalek]” the term, as
it attached to survivors of the Holocaust, appears in a quantitative, almost
technical usage. A slightly different version but with the same connota-
tion – She´erith Yisrael – the Remnant of Israel appears in Jeremiah 31:7
and from there found its way into the Verses of Supplication in the Daily
Prayer Book.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust the term, in its broadest construction,
connoted the saved remnant, that is to say, all European Jews who sur-
vived the Nazi onslaught including the hundreds of thousands of Polish,
Baltic and Russian Jews deported to the interior of the Soviet Union
for political reasons or as part of Stalin’s “scorched earth” policy. In a
more limited sense She´erith Hapleitah referred to the collective identity
of some 300,000 displaced persons in Occupied Germany, Austria and
Italy who turned their backs on their former lives and actively sought to
leave Europe for Palestine and many other destinations. Having escaped
the unavoidable constraints of rebuilding their former lives and now liv-
ing temporarily under American protection in a land they despised, it

2 See Alex Grobman, Rekindling the Flame: American Jewish Chaplains and the Survivors of
European Jewry (Detroit, 1993).
3 See Dalia Ofer, “The Leadership of the Yishuv and She’erit Hapleitah,” in Yisrael
Gutman and Adina Drechsler, eds., She’erit Hapleitah 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and
was primarily these survivors who publicly identified themselves as the Surviving Remnant. For some of the leaders of this unique community driven by a sense of historical responsibility, She’erith Hapleitah was also viewed as the saving remnant who were called upon to play a formative role in shaping the Jewish future. In the words of Samuel Gringauz, one of their prominent leaders:

The Sherit Hapleita sees as its task to symbolize the Jewish national tragedy this task is viewed as one laid upon it by destiny and history regardless of the strength of its bearers The Sherit Hapleita must demonstrate to all Jews everywhere their involvement in a common fate Jewish unity for them is no political program but an actual and living fact of experience. This is why they feel themselves prophets of a national rebirth and of being the backbone of its realization For international Zionism the Sherit Hapleita is an argument, a strength, a reserve Without the situation of the DP’s as a basis of appeal, American Jewry could not be mobilized so effectively for the upbuilding of Palestine, nor could the Jews of other lands be nationally awakened and united. Thus the Sherit Hapleita feels today that it is the dynamic force of the Jewish future.

The discussion opens towards the end of 1944 as the Second World War is entering its final stages and in the concentration camps of Germany, the inmates take their first steps towards preparing for liberation. The narrative draws to a close in early 1947 when She’erith Hapleitah is well established and the major institutions that will accompany it to its dissolution in 1948–1949 are firmly in place. It has not been our intention, furthermore, to write a comprehensive history of this brief, albeit pregnant moment in history. We wish to focus on the internal history of a unique community that had abandoned its past and was yet to find its future. Much of what has been written to date looks at She’erith Hapleitah through the eyes of others and thus has often failed to disclose their richly complex inner life. Our concern is with this dynamic community of survivors itself, its people, movements, ideas, institutions and self-understanding, how it grappled with the unbearable weight of the past, the strains of the present and the shape of a different future. She’erith Hapleitah as subjects rather than as objects of history is what we seek to uncover.

Thus, a good few months before the war was over the seeds of survivor organization were germinating in Buchenwald, in the numerous satellite camps of Dachau and elsewhere. On the morrow of liberation of the camps in April–May 1945 we already witness a flurry of activity amongst the survivors that naturally focused on the pressing problems of

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4 Samuel Gringauz, “Jewish Destiny as the DP’s See It,” Commentary, vol. 4, no. 6 (December 1947): 501.
food, health, shelter, clothing, the search for family and a safe future but which, over the next few months, rapidly elaborated itself into a network of representative and camp councils, political movements, newspapers, youth groups, children’s homes and schools, vocational training and a wide range of cultural pursuits. Amidst this remarkable effort at self-rehabilitation in the most unpromising of circumstances, we also find the first sustained public attempt to grapple with both the implications of the Shoah and some of the major questions of post-Holocaust Jewish life: who would lead the Jewish world with the demise of European Jewry? How would Jewish life and faith change in the aftermath? How should the Jewish people relate to those that turned on them or that stood by in their hour of need? How should they relate to the civilization that for so many Jews held out the promise of a more humane future? In a profound sense She’erith Hapeleita served as a formative bridge between the Holocaust and what was to come after.

Despite its importance and some early attention, the inner history of She’erith Hapeleita has suffered neglect and, until recently, was almost a forgotten history. In 1947 comprehensive reports were published by Leo Srole, the social welfare officer of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in the Landsberg camp, by Koppel Pinson, the well-known historian who directed the Education Department of the Joint Distribution Committee in Germany and by Chaim Hoffman (Yachil) who headed the Palestinian Delegation to Occupied Germany. In 1953 Leo Schwarz who served as director of the JDC in Germany from 1946 to 1947 published the first and to date the only full-scale history of She’erith Hapeleita in Germany. It appears that initially only those who worked with the survivors in Germany saw the broader historical implications of their personal engagement.

Over the next twenty years very little was written on the subject and it was in 1970, twenty-five years after the liberation of the camps, that the picture begins to change: Zemach Zemarion who himself served with She’erith Hapeleita in Occupied Germany published his survey of survivor newspapers as an expression of their most pressing concerns while Yehuda Bauer published his study on the Brichah, the illegal or semi-legal

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9 Zemach Zemarion, Ha-itonut shel She’erith Hapeleita ke-bitui le-ba’ayotheka (The press of She’erith Hapeleita as an expression of its problems) (Tel Aviv, 1970).
movement of some 250,000 Jews from Eastern Europe primarily to the American Zones of Occupied Germany and Austria.10 Bauer concluded that from mid-1944 to October 1945, when the first Palestinian emissaries were integrated into this clandestine activity, the *Brichah*, which quietly received financial help from the JDC, was entirely the initiative and work of survivors. This went against the grain of conventional wisdom and, in some quarters, is still looked at skeptically despite additional research that has confirmed Bauer’s conclusions.11 In a parallel study Bauer suggested that in the larger scheme of things this movement was also of critical importance in the creation of the State of Israel, a theme that will be addressed below.12

How, then, does one account for this seeming neglect when rich archival material was readily available to historians in both Israel and abroad? First, it was perhaps to be expected that the brief moment of *She’erith Hapleitah* on the stage of history would be overshadowed by the devastation of the Holocaust on the one hand and the revolutionary promise of Jewish statehood on the other. In addition the widespread sense, both secular and religious, that the move from Holocaust to Rebirth was ineluctable, almost preordained, meant that the stormy and uncertain progression of events from May 1945 to May of 1948 was lost from view. If what happened was inevitable, there was scant need to trace the detailed unfolding of events while carefully assessing the concrete contributions of those involved. This lack of attention to detail was reinforced in Israel by the widespread, close to axiomatic assumption that the underground fighting forces had pushed out the British and, in their military victory over the Arabs, achieved statehood.

If it became apparent that statehood was not a direct outcome of the Holocaust and that, in fact, the destruction of the human hinterland of the Zionist movement in Eastern Europe almost precluded the achievement of Jewish sovereignty, this might open the way to new interpretations of the move from Holocaust to Homeland. And, indeed, this is what has happened. A series of new studies tracing the interrelationship of British, American and Zionist diplomacy in the aftermath of the Second World

12 Yehuda Bauer, “The Holocaust and the Struggle of the Yishuv as Factors in the Creation of the State of Israel,” in *Holocaust and Rebirth: A Symposium* (Jerusalem, 1974), and “From the Holocaust to the State of Israel,” in *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, 2001).
War rendered the compelling story of the phoenix rising from the ashes somewhat suspect and suggested in its stead a story of turbulent ups and downs with no certain outcome. Some historians of Zionism have gone so far as to suggest that Jewish statehood was achieved at the last moment in a political constellation that, in point of fact, did not favor the success of the Zionist endeavor. In his conclusion to *A History of Zionism* Walter Laqueur argues that: “The Jewish state came into being at the very time when Zionism had lost its erstwhile raison d’être: to provide an answer to the plight of east European Jewry. The United Nations decision of November 1947 was in all probability the last opportunity for the Zionist movement to achieve a breakthrough.”

Historians of the period, nonetheless, were slow to revise their estimate of the minor role allotted to *She’erith Hapleitah* itself in these developments. Part of the explanation might lie in the focus of these studies which unthinkingly cast the survivors into a subsidiary role of supplicants: their basic necessities were supplied by the US Army, their camps were administered by UNRRA, they were supported by the Joint, inspired by soldiers of the Jewish Brigade, guided politically by the Palestinian Delegation, led over the Alps and transported to Palestine by the *Mossad Le-Aliyah Bet* and their political fate was ultimately determined by the domestic pressure of American Jewry and the creation of the State of Israel. While this description is not without truth it does tend, without ill intent, to cast *She’erith Hapleitah* into a supine role and deprives them of a will of their own.

This image of passivity was rendered more plausible, moreover, by a pervasive stereotype that portrayed survivors as broken and helpless, ground to dust by unspeakable torture, a view that began to circulate

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