

The physicians in Sanz Briz's list, the "Angel of Budapest"

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ABSTRACT

Ángel Sanz Briz was a Spanish diplomat who worked at the Spanish Embassy in Hungary during the Second World War. After the Nazi invasion of Hungary in March 1944, a series of decrees persecuting the Jewish community were approved and, soon after, Jews began to be deported to extermination camps.

Thanks to Sanz Briz, many Jews, including a considerable number of physicians, received "letters of protection" and were sheltered in safe houses annexed to the Spanish mission, avoiding deportation.

We collected data on Jewish physicians named in the recently published list of Jews whose lives were saved by the Spanish diplomat.

The figure of Sanz Briz, known as the "Angel of Budapest," has received little recognition.

KEYWORDS

Ángel Sanz Briz, Holocaust, Hungary, Righteous Among the Nations, physicians

The idea that Spain was neutral during the Second World War and therefore played a secondary or negligible role in the conflict continues to be widespread. However, recent publications, studies, and conferences provide evidence to the contrary. Spain played a relevant role, displaying a clear affinity for Nazi Germany and other members of the Axis powers (the military coalition that fought against the Allies during the Second World War), such as Italy, while simultaneously providing shelter to refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. In addition to accepting refugees, Spain allowed several diplomatic actions, which resulted from the personal initiative of

individual diplomats but were not expressly prohibited by the Spanish government.¹

The deportation of all Hungarian Jews started on 15 May 1944 and, in less than two months, nearly half a million individuals (many of whom were physicians) were sent to the extermination camps.² Several diplomatic missions from neutral countries in Budapest protected Jewish citizens. In the case of Spain, we should highlight the role of the diplomat Ángel Sanz Briz (1910-1980) (Figure 1). Sanz Briz was born in Zaragoza on 28 September 1910. After studying law, he was admitted to the Diplomatic School of Spain, and his first posting was to Cairo as a



Figure 1. Ángel Sanz Briz during his time as *chargé d'affaires* at the Spanish mission in Budapest, wearing the uniform of the Diplomatic Corps.

chargé d'affaires at the Spanish Embassy in Egypt. On 10 May 1942, aged 31 years, he was appointed second secretary at the Spanish Embassy in Hungary, and from June 1944 he was put in charge of the Spanish mission in Budapest as a *chargé d'affaires* when the Spanish government, which did not recognise the new puppet government, withdrew the Spanish Ambassador Miguel Ángel de Muguero. Sanz Briz informed his superiors at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the dreadful situation of the Jews living in Budapest and the implementation of protocols for deporting them to extermination camps. In view of the advance of the Soviet troops, Sanz Briz received precise instructions from the Spanish government to leave Budapest, as Spain was an enemy of the communist Soviet Union, and he left for Switzerland on 6 December 1944. After the end of the Second World War, Sanz Briz was posted to the United States, Ecuador, Switzerland, France, Guatemala, the Netherlands, and Belgium. On 9 March 1973, at the age of 63 years, Sanz Briz inaugurated the Spanish

Embassy in the People's Republic of China, in Beijing, where he became the first Spanish Ambassador. He was finally posted to Rome in 1976, as Spanish Ambassador to the Holy See, and died on 11 June 1980 in the Palace of Spain, seat of the Embassy.

During the Holocaust, Sanz Briz wrote so-called "letters of protection" for Jews living in Budapest. At first, these letters were issued only to Sephardic Jews, by virtue of an old Royal Decree issued in 1924 during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, but some time later they began to be issued to all persecuted Jews, whom Sanz Briz passed off as Sephardic Jews.³ To protect their lives, Sanz Briz sheltered the protected Jews in eight (and later eleven) buildings that he himself had rented in different locations in Budapest, arguing that they were annexes to the Spanish Embassy and were therefore considered to have extraterritoriality. He went so far as to persuade the International Red Cross to place signs in Spanish in hospitals, orphanages, and maternity clinics to protect the Jews in these places.

Table 1. List of the Jewish physicians saved by Sanz Briz, known as the “Angel of Budapest”

Surname, Name	Birth year	Specialty	Outcome
Antal, János	1869	Dentist	Died in 1945
Aszódi, Zoltán	1891	Internist	Remained in Hungary after the war (died in 1971)
Bálint, István	1912	Neuropsychiatrist	Remained in Hungary after the war (died in 1989)
Deutsch, Zoltán	1881	Pharmacologist	Died in 1944
Faragó, Pál	1900	—	Remained in Hungary after the war (died in 1945)
Farkas, Endre	1902	Psychiatrist	Died during the war (1945) (forced labour)
Fodor, Ferencz	1914	Pulmonologist	Exiled (died in New York)
Friedrich, László	1892	Internist	Remained in Hungary after the war (died in 1958)
Friedrich, Vilmos	1864	Internist	Remained in Hungary after the war (died in 1945)
Gábor, Gyula	1895	—	Unknown
Keleti, Arthur	1892	—	Died during the war
László, Iván	1903	Psychiatrist	Exiled
Liebmann, István	1886	—	Unknown
Miskolczy, Ferenc	1914	Internist	Died during the war
Posá, Imre	1901	—	Unknown
Székács, István	1907	Psychoanalyst	Remained in Hungary after the war (died in 1999)
Tímár, Miklós	1914	Internist	Remained in Hungary after the war
Vas, Gyögy	1918	—	Died during the war

The list of Jews whose lives were saved by Sanz Briz, known as the “Angel of Budapest,” may be consulted online (Figure 2).⁴ We collected the names of the Jewish physicians saved by the Spanish diplomat and compared them against the list provided by the most comprehensive study of Jewish health professionals in Hungary published to date⁵; the results are presented in Table 1.

According to the available data, Sanz Briz saved the lives of 18 health professionals: eight of them remained in Hungary, one died as a consequence of forced labour, two took exile in the United States, and the whereabouts of the remaining seven is unknown.

In addition to the internists, we would like to mention the relatively high proportion of neuropsychiatrists who were saved by Sanz Briz, which reflects the considerable development of this specialty in Central Europe during the first half of the 20th century. Iván László emigrated to New York, where he worked as a psychiatrist. Although Endre Farkas is listed as one of the

individuals protected by the Spanish Embassy, he died due to sepsis in January 1945 while performing forced labour, according to a statement by his widow, kept at the Yad Vashem Archives.⁶ Another two psychiatrists remained in Hungary after the Second World War. One was István Székács, who was appointed dean of the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis; it was in Budapest that he died at the age of 92 years.⁷ The other was István Bálint, a neurologist, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst who was imprisoned under the communist regime in 1955, and died in Budapest in 1989. He was chief of the State Protection Authority, the secret police of the People’s Republic of Hungary, in the final years of the 1940s, and subsequently worked as chief inspector of the Association for the Protection of Mental Health and became a member of the National Institute for Occupational Health.⁸

Ángel Sanz Briz issued letters of protection to nearly 5000 Jews and sheltered them in safe houses annexed to the Spanish mission to save them from deportation.⁹ On

Figure 2. Several pages from Sanz Briz' list, officially "List of protected individuals in possession of Spanish passports." Reports on the situation of Hungarian prisoners and deportees at the Nazi concentration camps. Special mention of the Auschwitz Protocols. List of protected individuals in possession of Spanish passports. Source: Archivo General de la Administración, AGA,82.05247,005.

8 October 1966, Yad Vashem (Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust) named him a "Righteous Among the Nations," the highest honour to be given by the Israeli government to non-Jewish individuals for risking their lives to aid Jews during the Holocaust.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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