

Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands. Ed. Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval. Jewish Cultures and Contexts Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. ix, 382 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Illustrations. Index. Photographs. Maps. Tables. \$80.53, hard bound.
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Most standard portrayals of Jewish life in Stalinist Czechoslovakia focus on the devastation caused by genocide and migration, as well as the antisemitic terror that accompanied the 1952 Slánský Trial; another nail in the coffin for Jewish life in the Bohemian lands. In *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands*, historian Kateřina Čapková paints a starkly different picture. “Paradoxically,” she argues, “compared to the 1970s and 1980s, the 1950s were also a period in which Jewish communities flourished. Irrespective of the anti-Jewish political campaign of the 1950s, interviews, photographs (mostly from private collections), and documents of local Jewish communities offer a vivid picture of a number of flourishing communities in the 1950s and 1960s” (256). This is one of the many new insights one can find in the superb edited volume, which has also appeared in Czech and German-language editions, written by a collective of scholars working in the Czech Republic, the US, Hungary, Austria, and Germany.

Prague and Beyond covers the period from 1500 to the present. In seven chapters, the authors set out to write “a comprehensive history of the Jews in the Bohemian Lands that synthesizes and revises existing scholarship. . . a volume of connected and integrated chapters whose goal is to narrate and analyze the Jewish experience in the Bohemian Lands as an integral and inseparable part of the development of Central Europe and its peoples” (1). The authors, who have worked together on this volume for several years, seek to achieve this integration of the chapters by adopting a shared methodology: one that is analytical and descriptive; looks at distinctive patterns and broader trends; encompasses Prague and rural and small town communities and their distinctive networks; and addresses the lives of ordinary people as well as those of elites (2). Each chapter begins by introducing a historical individual or a moment as “a point of entry” into the wider story about to unfold in each chapter (2).

While the volume’s authors certainly synthesize the scholarly literature relevant for their periods, they introduce much new and exciting material and analysis into their narratives. Primary sources in particular make the history being told come alive; often encapsulating the complexity and diversity of Jewish life in the region. These primary materials range from travel narratives, testimonies and memoirs, to archival documents from authorities (be they Jewish communal functionaries, clergy, or public officials in local, regional, and state institutions) to newspapers, prayer books, photographs, and other images. Indeed, the authors invite the reader to look over their shoulder as they introduce sources and conclusions drawn from them in their respective chapters (for examples, see pages 59–60 and 255).

The book opens with a fascinating chapter by Verena Kasper-Marienberg and Joshua Teplitsky that covers the early modern period. It depicts the dynamics that shaped different forms of Jewish settlements in Bohemia and Moravia and day-to-day patterns that emerged among Jews who, on the one hand, lived lives socially and religiously distinct from Christian society, but on the other, interacted with Christians in a myriad of ways, especially in the market place. The emergence of the Absolutist state, where authorities increasingly perceived Jews as a threat, as well as Jews’ responses to new policies is the central topic of Chapter 2. Michael L. Miller covers both the effects of new state policies; the ways in which these developments shaped Jews’ everyday lives; and how new religious leadership models formed in

response to these broader changes. Education serves as an entry point for Hillel J. Kieval, in Chapter 3, which covers the period from the 1790s to the mid-1800s. Kieval focuses on the new types of Jewish schools that accompanied the Josephinian reforms and the significance of secular higher education for Jewish literature and politics. Despite the cultural changes, he suggests, social integration remained limited. Chapter 4, by Michal Frankl, Martina Niedhammer, and Ines Koeltzsch examines Jews' emancipation and participation in economic, political, social, and cultural life in the region as well as Jews' increasing visibility in the region's booming cities, a presence that met with non-Jews' hostility and, at times, violence. The chapter's focus on integration, participation, and rejection culminates with the Jewish refugee crisis that affected the Bohemian lands during WWI. Indeed, the war's refugee crisis and anti-Jewish violence, mobilized central European Jews in unprecedented ways to assist the refugees and fight back against anti-Jewish measures and rhetoric. The presence of thousands of Jewish refugees in the Bohemian lands was a key backdrop to the Jewish experience of the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the emergence of successor states.

In Chapter 5, the author trio present an outstanding discussion of Jewish life and culture in interwar Czechoslovakia, spanning the new political geography that Jews faced; Jews' political and cultural responses to nationalism, socialism, and fascism; as well as the tension between some Jews' cultural distinctiveness and the quest for political and social integration. Benjamin Frommer's excellent chapter on the Holocaust directs our attention to the German and Czech anti-Jewish persecution as it played out in towns and cities of Bohemia and Moravia, rather than the ghettos and killing centers where the majority of the region's Jews were murdered by the Germans. Significantly, Frommer focuses on how Jews—including the many that lived in marriages with so-called "Aryans"—rapidly found themselves living in "a ghetto without walls," their lives, their mobility, their relationships, and their resources steadily diminishing. The book's last chapter, written by Kateřina Čapková, covers the period from 1945 to the present. She describes a socio-cultural transformation of Jewish life brought about not only by the destruction of the Holocaust and postwar expulsions, but by the profoundly different communities Jewish survivors created after the war. In the depopulated border regions, Jewish migrants from Subcarpathian Ruthenia, working class and religiously observant, reestablished families and formed new communities with a vibrant religious life, all in sharp contrast to the culture of "native" Jewish communities in the twentieth century. *Prague and Beyond* is a tour-de-force that reveals people's ability to adapt culturally and politically; find meaning and community within the bounds of the possible; and continue to make the Bohemian lands a site for Jewish life that is both distinct and local as well as deeply connected to transnational Jewish networks.

Prague and Beyond is a truly impressive achievement with much to offer both the specialist and the general reader. This is reflected in the inclusion of a key tool for a wide-ranging book like this one: maps. Each chapter opens with one map that locates the region in its wider political context and a second map that depicts the demographic development of Jewish societies in the same location. An appendix, by Helena Klímová and Lenka Matušíková, provide detailed historical and demographic data for each place. Furthermore, most of the chapters achieve precisely what the authors set out to do: provide a synthesis of high-quality research and a dynamic narrative enlivened by stories of the fascinating lives of ordinary people.

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