

# **Pogrom and Plunder: The Socioeconomic Motives for the Holocaust in the Czech Microregion of Vizovice**

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Bakalářská práce 2016



Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně  
Fakulta humanitních studií

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Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně

Fakulta humanitních studií

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

akademický rok: 2015/2016

## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Radim Sazima**  
Osobní číslo: **H11814**  
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**  
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**  
Forma studia: **prezenční**

Téma práce: **Pogromy a krádeže: Socioekonomické motivy holokaustu v mikroregionu Vizovice**

Zásady pro vypracování:

**Shromáždění odborných materiálů a dalších dostupných materiálů k tématu bakalářské práce**

**Nastudování zvolených sekundárních zdrojů a materiálů**

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**Vyvození a formulace závěru práce**

Rozsah bakalářské práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

**Ben-Sasson, Haim Hillel, ed. A History of the Jewish People. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.**

**Čížmář, Josef. Dějiny a paměti města Vizovice. Brno: Nákladem vlastním, 1933.**

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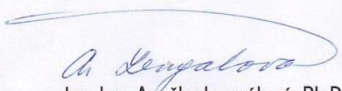
Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Gregory Jason Bell, B.A., M.B.A., M.A., Ph.D.**

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **13. listopadu 2015**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **6. května 2016**

Ve Zlíně dne 16. prosince 2015

  
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Cílem této práce bylo zjistit, zda židé žijící v mikroregionu Vizovice byli diskriminováni, a pokud ano, z jakých důvodů. První polovina práce zkoumá ekonomické, sociální a politické aspekty života židů ve Vizovicích a blízkém okolí před druhou světovou válkou. Druhá část zkoumá průběh holocaustu v mikroregionu, s cílem určit zda jsou vinni nežidovští občané, a pokud ano, identifikovat jejich motivy. Na závěr tato práce zkoumá následné navrácení majetku přeživším holocaustu.

Klíčová slova: židé, holocaust, pogrom, druhá světová válka, Němci, nacisté, Češi, Vizovice, Morava

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to determine whether or not the Jewish inhabitants of the microregion of Vizovice were discriminated against, and if so, for what reasons. The first part of the thesis examines the economic, social and political aspects of Jewish life in Vizovice and its surroundings prior to World War II. The second part looks at how the Holocaust played out in the microregion, to determine if the local gentiles were at all culpable, and if so, to identify their motives. Finally, the thesis examines the subsequent restoration of property to Holocaust survivors.

Keywords: Jews, Holocaust, pogrom, Second World War, World War II, Germans, Nazis, Czechs, Vizovice, Moravia

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Firstly, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Gregory Jason Bell. Without his assistance and dedicated involvement in every step of the writing process, this thesis would have never been completed. Secondly, I would like to thank Mr. Saul Rachelson of Tampa, Florida for his financial support. Finally, I acknowledge my parents for their patience and support during my studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although the Jewish community has never been large, its economic accomplishments have been. Throughout history, Jews have been forced to repeatedly relocate, which has forced them to adapt and find new ways to earn their livelihoods. As a result, they became adept at business. Throughout the centuries, the Jewish businessmen of the Vizovice microregion of Czech Moravia slowly but steadily improved their lot. This accumulation of wealth, however, came to a sudden and dramatic end during the Second World War, when the local gentiles and the Germans combined forces to rob the local Jews of not only their wealth but, in most cases, their lives.

This bachelor thesis begins by examining the initial settlement of Jews in the Vizovice microregion. The second chapter documents the prosperity of this Jewish community after the 1848 revolution. The third chapter provides information about the prosperous lives of local Jews between 1848 and 1914, and then briefly documents how the First World War influenced this Jewish community. The fourth and fifth chapters record the increasing aggression against Vizovice Jews before the Second World War. The sixth chapter documents the eruption of anti-Semitic attacks during the pre-war years and outlines the beginning of the Second World War. The seventh chapter discusses the arrival of Nazi forces into the Vizovice microregion, the forced takeover of Jewish businesses and the incorporation of these businesses into the German war machine. It also documents the behaviour of the Gestapo in Vizovice. The eighth chapter discusses the assassination of Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich and its outcomes. The deportation and almost total extermination of Jews from the microregion of Vizovice is examined in this chapter. The final chapter explains how the concentration camp survivors were treated upon their return home, and it documents the influence of the communist revolution of 1948 on the local Jewish community. Finally, it notes the continued discrimination against local Jews during the communist era.

Ultimately, this thesis proves that the business successes of the Jews of the Vizovice microregion led to their downfall. It was Jews, through their production of quality liquors, who made Vizovice famous worldwide, a success which led them up the local social and political ladder. However, this success was their undoing, as their increasing prosperity and power in the microregion increased their visibility and, combined with their different reli-

gion and ethnicity, made them natural targets not only for discrimination but ultimately for destruction.

## 1 BEGINNING OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT AND FIRST OBSTRUCTIONS

The first record of Jews in the city of Vizovice can be found in an agreement from 1662 that states the legacy of the Vizovice manor. Important for our purposes is that this agreement also recognizes the presence of a Jewish, distiller meaning that there was at least one Jew possibly with his family, who lived in Vizovice and was responsible for running the local distillery.<sup>1</sup> But an earlier Jewish settlement in Vizovice was possible thanks to an act by King Ladislav Pohrobek, which in 1454 expelled all Jews from royal cities in Moravia, except for Uherské Hradiště. From Uherské Hradiště, Jews were driven out in 1514. Jews were allowed to enter these cities only under special conditions, and therefore they had to find other places to live. Because of this act, Jews were only allowed to live in smaller cities or villages.<sup>2</sup>

The next recorded information we have about Jews in Vizovice is from a list of buildings constructed in the village between 1679 and 1726. Vizovice was attacked by Hungarians, who destroyed many buildings. The owners of Vizovice then constructed many new houses and buildings for their serfs, among them a house of a Jew and department store for a Jew. These buildings were costly, but the costs were far outweighed by the income that the authority gained from the rent. The cost of the house was 68 golden coins and 37 crowns, but the rent in 1750 amounted to 110 golden coins. These numbers suggest that the Jewish occupants of the house were prosperous and were therefore an important source of income for the authority in Vizovice. Also significant was a new distillery, controlled by Jews.<sup>3</sup>

The first known Jew in Vizovice was a man named Salomon. He was the tenant at the distillery in 1738 and had to pay rent to the authority. The distillery was appraised at a value of 433 gold coins and 38 crowns in 1779. That same year, the distillery was prosperous, netting the authority 900 golden coins. This income was supported by the forced purchase of goods by serfs, because 5 pubs in the city and others in villages around Vizovice

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1 Josef Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice* (Brno: nákladem vlastním, 1933), 64.

2 Tomáš Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě* (Praha: Sefer, 2001), 49.

3 Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 76.

were owned by the authority.<sup>4</sup> Further restrictions applied specifically to Jews. One local law stated that “no Jew can buy beer from citizens across the street or will be fined.”<sup>5</sup>

Even though Jews were prosperous and were creating great income for the authority, not only in Vizovice but throughout the Czech lands, they were discriminated against. A Jewish house could not be in the city and was constructed outside its limits. This was because of the translocation rescript of December 1726 that ordered Jews to live on special streets in predetermined districts in cities and villages. The number of Jewish families was limited by *numerous clauses* that allowed only 5,106 Jewish families in all of Moravia. To keep these numbers, the population growth of Jews was regulated by the *familiant law* of 1726. This law stated that only the oldest son can get married and have children. Other sons had to leave the country in order to get married. Daughters were very often married off to men in foreign countries. Only Jews that were married or widowed and had children were given citizenship. New citizenship was possible only by death or under special conditions.<sup>6</sup>

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Empress Maria Theresa ordered Jews to wear a special mark – unmarried men had to wear a yellow band on their forearm and women had to wear a similar one in their hair. A devout Catholic, Maria Theresa disliked the Jewish community and accused them of national disloyalty. She initially ordered all Jews to leave the kingdom, before recanting the order after it was determined that the economic damage associated with the order would be too great. All Jews then had to pay a special tax so that they could stay in the Czech lands for the next decade. In 1758 when the 10-year period ended, all the Jews were allowed to live in the country but with continuous taxation.<sup>7</sup>

The life of Jews slightly changed during the reign of Josef II. He issued the *Toleranzpatent* in early 1782 that stated that all the people living in the states regardless of their nationality or religion should have liberty and should be able to gather wealth. However this patent indicated that there is no plan to increase the number of Jews in these states.

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4 Marcel Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích* (Vizovice: Nakladatelství Rudolf Jelinek, 2005), 7.

5 Čížmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 194.

6 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 95.

7 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 98-108.

Jews were still tolerated by the king's "degree of usefulness." The biggest change for Jews was the permission to send their children to general schools and also build their own schools. Furthermore, Jews were given the right to learn crafts, and others were given the right to employ Jews.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to such permissions, Jews began to prosper more in Vizovice. In 1782, the rent of the distillery was no longer recorded just by itself but also with a tannery, which shows that these two buildings were let together and the rent was paid by one person. Additionally, the rent of these buildings was 1,066 gold coins and 30 crowns, a great sum of money.<sup>9</sup>

From 1792 to 1815, the government of Leopold II demanded financial help and also food and other supplies because of the war against the French Empire. In order to support Leopold's army, the Moravian congress agreed on a war loan and also appealed on authorities to send their silver jewels and vessels to the emperor's mint. The supply of food for soldiers was attractive for all merchants, and the Jewish store possibly made a sizeable profit from this war. The rent was unchanged from 1750 to 1792 so that the Jewish store could exist in Vizovice. Clearly the authority wanted the Jewish merchant to remain.<sup>10</sup>

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Jews were not allowed to build any real estate or own a property. Jews had to live in rented houses. There were not many Jews in Vizovice in the eighteenth century and no Jews at all in nearby villages. Despite the fact that Jews were prohibited to own real estate, the distillery was sold to Jew Markus Löw for 10,000 gold coins. Even though the distillery became private property, Löw had to pay a rent of 1,300 gold coins annually. The distillery was not bought back by the authority in Vizovice, but because renters were changing very often it was taken back by the authority in 1819. The authority in Vizovice then went back to renting the distillery.<sup>11</sup>

Two significant businesses, the distillery and brewery, were owned since 1830 by Mojžíš Strassmann. These two businesses were the most profitable for the authority in Vizovice. In 1813, they were valued at approximately 48,000 gold coins.<sup>12</sup> The last name is of German origin and that is because of a regulation stating that every Jewish man had to

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8 Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 756.

9 Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 84.

10 Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 88.

11 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 8-9.

12 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 8-9.

change the family name and the name must be of German origin. In addition, each individual had to choose his or her own first name that is of German origin.<sup>13</sup> This was one of the first attempts to Germanize the Jewish population.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, around three or four Jewish families lived in Vizovice. According to the 1843 census, there were 2,528 residents of Vizovice and 524 houses. Taking these numbers (5 people per household) into account, around twenty Jews lived in Vizovice in that time. These families worked and lived in the houses they rented from the authority. However an 1848 revolution throughout Europe led to social changes, especially for European Jewry. In Vizovice the last feudal lord was Baron Filip Stillfried.<sup>14</sup> The former authority did not have problems with Jews in Vizovice and gladly rented them the distillery and brewery, the two most profitable companies in Vizovice. The Jews in Vizovice followed the *familiant law* and *numerous clauses*, supplied the city and nearby villages with alcohol and changed their names and spoke German. Therefore, there was no great opposition to the emancipation of Jews apart from in Prague, where riots started in April.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 115.

14 Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 809.

15 Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 92.

## 2 PROSPERITY AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF 1848

The revolution that took part from 1848 to 1849 changed the European social structure. The nobility lost its power and could no longer administer property. A system of public administration was introduced, as was equality of citizens. This changed the whole point of view on Jews and their social integration became easier. The Jewish religion became equal to all others in the Czech lands. The *familiant law* and *numerous clauses* were invalidated, and Jews were able to acquire property.<sup>16</sup>

Such revolutionary changes were clearly visible in Vizovice. Baron Stillfried lost his power, but his property remained under his possession. He continued in renting the distillery to Jewish citizens, as the former authority was not experienced to run such a business. The rent, however, decreased every year so he sold the distillery to Mr. and Mrs. Mandl in 1857. As the Jews were able to sell and buy property, the second owner, Aaron Eichen, was also Jewish. The Eichen family originated from the ghetto in Lipník nad Bečvou, and they owned the distillery until 1865. On the other hand, the brewery was not sold but was rented to Šimon Frisch, who was of Jewish origin and brewed beer until 1891. This takeover ended the era of the Strassmann family, which had operated the brewery since 1819.<sup>17</sup>

Moravia was affected by the Austro-Prussian war that took place in 1866. Soldiers had to be supplied with food, and so the prices of all goods doubled. The Vizovice district had to turn over provisions, and the city suffered food shortages. The city was occupied by the Prussian army in July 1866. The Jewish population and wealthy citizens were scared, and they abandoned the city, until the Prussians departed. The Prussians did not plunder Vizovice, and they paid for everything they took.<sup>18</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Jewish population in Vizovice was much larger than in the past. This growth of population can be attributed to the 1848 revolution that equalized Jews and their religion. The census of 1880 recorded 46 Jews living in

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16 Milan Hlavačka, "Dědictví Revoluce 1848–1849," Akademický Bulletin, <http://abicko.avcr.cz/2008/3/04/dedictvi-revoluce-1848-1849.html> (accessed March 30, 2015).

17 Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 197.

18 Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 94.

Vizovice,<sup>19</sup> most having originated in ghettos in Holešov, Hranice na Moravě and Lipník nad Bečvou, cities well known for their Jewish communities and structures.<sup>20</sup>

In 1882, Gustav Eichen wanted to retire, so he rented his distillery to Jakub Jelínek and his son. Jakub Jelínek owned a business with liquors and furthermore was a brewer and therefore had some qualification to run the distillery in Vizovice, but because a business he was running in nearby Luhačovice was flourishing, he had his son Zikmund Jelínek manage the distillery. The agreement allowed Jelínek to rent the distillery until 1889. Zikmund Jelínek was prosperous, but despite this he sold the distillery to Šimon Frisch, the local brewer. Frisch came from a family of brewers, and therefore he tended more to the brewery than the distillery. In 1891, he wanted to build a bar in the distillery, because of the bankruptcy of the brewery. He asked for permission, but it was denied. Frisch then left town, and sold the distillery in 1895 to Karel Singer.<sup>21</sup>

According to the 1900 census, 2,706 people lived in Vizovice, and 2.73 percent were of Jewish origin. There were only 3 Germans in Vizovice and 1 Pole. Since 1880, the percentage of Jews in Vizovice had risen by 1 percent.<sup>22</sup> After the revolution in 1848, Jews began to live in villages that were part of the region of Vizovice. They no longer had to stay in cities. In 1890, a small numbers of Jews (between 2 and 12) lived in 14 villages near Vizovice. In 1890, the townlet of Slušovice was home to 3 Jewish families, or 19 people in all.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, Jews were under constant oppression by the Christian community. There are several songs that were sung in pubs that specifically stated that the Jews are bad for the community. Other songs that were created by citizens of Vizovice mocked the Jewish community. Jewish children were specifically mocked by schoolyard rhymes, some of which were overtly offensive. This was in part because of the clothes they used to wear. Jews were known for their wealth, and this was also a reason

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16. 19 Marcel Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," Master's Thesis (Slezská Univerzita, 1998),

20 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 19.

21 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 10-11.

22 Vladimír Stroblik, *Archiv Města Vizovice* (Okresní archiv Gotwaldow: Klečůvka, 1969), 3.

23 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 24-25.



why people defamed them.<sup>24</sup> Anti-Semitism broke out in 1899 with the *Hilsneriad*, an affair in which Leopold Hilsner was falsely accused and sentenced to death (later changed to life imprisonment) for murdering a nineteen year old girl near the city of Jihlava. This eventually ignited several pogroms in eastern Moravia, although the Jews of Vizovice were spared.<sup>25</sup>

Religious tolerance in Vizovice was not a problem between Catholics and Protestants. Protestants even used the Catholic Church. But this religious tolerance among local gentiles was not extended to Vizovice Jews. Jews had only one chapel, and they did not have a synagogue in Vizovice or nearby; the closest was probably in Uherské Hradiště, roughly 40 kilometers distant. Gentile residents of Vizovice expressed their dislike of aristocracy and Jews (some of whom had acquired large houses in the centre of town). With the First World War coming, local Christians complained that they, not aristocrats or Jews, would have to go to war.<sup>26</sup> Another problem that increased the hatred against Jews in Vizovice was that Jews were bilingual. At the beginning of the twentieth century, because of the *Hilsneriad* and pogroms that took place in nearby cities such as Holešov, Zlín, Vsetín and Uherské Hradiště, Jewish citizens hid their German language from the census taken. A handful of Germans lived in the Vizovice district before World War I, but there is no record of them expressing ill will towards the area's Jewish inhabitants.<sup>27</sup>

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24 Josef Čižmář, *Národopisné a Životopisné Paměti Vizovic* (Vyškov: nákladem vlastním, 1938), 18, 36.

25 Michal Frankl, *Naši Nebo Cizí?: Židé v českém 20. Století* (Praha: Židovské Muzeum v Praze - Institut Tereziánské Iniciativy, 2013), 152.

26 Čižmář, *Národopisné a Životopisné Paměti Vizovic*, 211.

27 Václav Peřinka, *Vizovský Okres* (Brno: Muzejní spolek, 1907), 18.

### 3 THE SILENCE BEFORE THE STORM

From 1900 to 1918, the life of Jews in Vizovice and surrounding villages was prosperous. Several businesses that were for a long period of time operated by Jewish families continued to flourish. Johana Weiss and her son Mořic continued to run the store her husband Josef Weiss established. The Strassmann family operated the same pub for over five decades, that is until Izák Strassmann died and his widow, who inherited the pub, rented it to the Singer family.<sup>28</sup> Their son, Rudolf Strassmann, graduated from the University of Vienna and became a junior clerk in Vizovice.<sup>29</sup>

Non-Jewish farmers in Vizovice were nettled by the prosperity of Jewish distilleries and founded their own distillery, RAZOV, nearby. But they could not compete with the Jewish distilleries, and they soon sold out.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Jewish distilleries were expanding.

Karel Singer moved to Vizovice in 1891 and found employment at Šimon Frisch's distillery. In 1893, Frisch rented his distillery to Singer, and then sold it to him in 1895. In 1902, Singer added an upstairs to his distillery.<sup>31</sup> His competition was another Jew, Zikmund Jelínek. In the 1890s, Jelínek bought land on a creek (distilleries require water) and two adjoining houses. In 1902, he obtained permission to distil liquors. In 1907, he expanded his operations to nearby Zádveřice, where he built a pub.<sup>32</sup> His success soon angered a gentile neighbor, who in 1913 successfully sued to stop Jelínek's construction of a warehouse.<sup>33</sup>

Before the First World War, the Jewish population in Europe flourished. There were approximately one and a half million of Jews in Austro-Hungarian Empire. Between 1848 and 1915, many Jews migrated to western countries from Russia and Poland, but we have no evidence of incomers to Vizovice.<sup>34</sup> Jews in Vizovice were not only active economically; they also wanted to be in charge of city management and professional associations. In 1913, a group of students, led by Jew Arnošt Singer, organized a public recital.

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28 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 24-25.

29 Čižmář, *Národopisné a Životopisné Paměti Vizovic*, 243.

30 Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 197.

31 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 10-11.

32 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i.n. 230, 7.

33 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 24-25.

34 Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 809.

Elections also provided an opportunity for Jews to integrate into the political life. The first great Jewish political success came in 1892. Into the 34-member city council were elected 3 Jews – Adolf Steinhart, Bernard Schrötter and Zikmund Jelínek. Other Jewish councilmen followed their lead, among them Mořic Weiss, Karel Singer, Jindřich Steinhart and JUDr. Rudolf Strassmann. Furthermore, in 1883 a new law ordered sole proprietors to be part of a sole proprietorship society.<sup>35</sup> This forced businessmen in the Vizovice microregion to create a Tradesmen's Association including Jews, some of whom became committee members.<sup>36</sup> Jews were long connected with lending money, and the situation in Vizovice was no different. In 1905, the Vizovice Savings Bank was established, and Zikmund Jelínek was one of the founders and also a member of the management committee.<sup>37</sup>

Jews founded their own association in 1894, named Sion. It was a solely Jewish organization, and it was created for religious and social reasons. In 1894, the newly established Sion rented house no. 133, and converted it into a chapel. This chapel was not big enough for the growing Jewish population, so in 1902 Sion bought a farmhouse near the square, and renovated it to meet their needs. In one part of the house lived a Jewish cantor, Gustav Pless, and the rest was modified into a synagogue.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.1 The change of posture toward the Jews during the post-war period

The First World War began on 28 July 1914, and the microregion of Vizovice was not immune to its influences. 200 local men were sent to the battlefield on the 1st of August, and a month later reserves ages 38 to 42 were sent to the front. Not only soldiers were having hard times; the prices of food, alcohol, and cattle doubled, and some people starved. Jews tried to help as much as they could, namely Karel Singer and Zikmund Jelínek contributed to charities and collections that were organized in the Vizovice micoregion.<sup>39</sup>

Among the conscripts were several Jews, namely Karel and Artur Weinstein, Josef Weiss, Rudolf and Vladimír Jelínek, Emil Schrötter and Otto Vogel. Karel Singer was

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35 "Historie Obchodních a živnostenských Komor Na území českých Zemí," Hospodářská Komora České Republiky, <http://www.komora.cz/historie/historie-obchodnich-a-zivnostenskych-komor-na-uzemi-ceskych-zemi.aspx> (accessed March 14, 2016).

36 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 38-40.

37 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i.n. 22.

38 Jaroslav Klenovský, *Židovské Památky Zlínského kraje* (Zlín: Krajská knihovna Františka Bartoše, 2010), 104-106.

39 Čizmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 94-98.

elected to the Commission for War Operations. Only Karel Weinstein died on the battlefield, and his name along with other victims is written on a plaque in the elementary school of Vizovice. Other Jews returned to Vizovice. Rudolf Jelínek and Josef Weiss came back as legionnaires.<sup>40</sup>

Towards the end of the war, hostility towards Jews became more transparent. Jews were closely connected with the monarchy, which had provided them coequality. Since the *Hilsneriad*, many riots against Jews in Czech lands had occurred, even during the First World War. These attacks had social and national reasons and were aimed largely against orthodox Jews from Galicia.<sup>41</sup> 73 of them were deported to Vizovice, and even though there was no attack on them, the people of Vizovice generally did not support their arrival because it raised already high prices.

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<sup>40</sup> Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 32-35.

<sup>41</sup> Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 511; Galicia is a historical region in what is now parts of Poland, Russia, and Ukraine.

#### 4 THE LAST GASP OF CZECH ANTI-SEMITISM IN MORAVIA BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Anti-Jewish attacks and riots occurred in the Czech lands during the nineteenth century. Czech nationalists were against Jews because of their close connection with the Habsburg monarchy. After the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, many Jewish inhabitants reported German nationality. Czech society finally achieved autonomy, and Jews were labelled as pro-German. As with the Jewish inhabitants of Vizovice, Jews nationwide were negatively associated with aristocrats; they were affluent, able to manage companies, people with money to lend and sometimes share, which they were not willing to do during the poor times after the war. Jews pushed Czech and Slovaks from their posts and took high positions in courts and hospitals.<sup>42</sup>

Several pogroms and anti-Jewish attacks happened across Moravia, namely in Holešov, Kroměříž, Uherské Hradiště, Kojetín, Napajedla, Kvasice, Bystřice pod Hostýnem and Valašské Klobouky. The biggest non-fascist pogrom took place on 3 and 4 December 1918 in Holešov, home to the nearest and largest Jewish community to the Vizovice microregion. During this pogrom, several buildings were set on fire or robbed. Two Jewish men were killed and several rapes occurred. Soldiers were sent to affected places to restore order. To Vizovice were sent 31 soldiers from Kroměříž on 15 November 1918. Two days later, night watches consisting of ordinary citizens were established. During these days, only small disorders occurred. A few peasants from Zádveřice village took a train to Vizovice in order to plunder Jewish shops.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the fact that Czech nationalists were against minorities in Czechoslovakia, the state gave full rights to Jews as a religious and ethnic minority. Czechoslovakia was the first state to do so after the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The First World War, attacks and pogroms on Jewish communities and the newly-created Czechoslovakia changed the Jewish societies from the demographic point of view. According to the census from 1921, 49.49% of Jews registered their nationality as Czechoslovak, 34.63% to German nationality and 14.60% to Jewish nationality. In 1930, the numbers changed because more than 5% of them reported themselves as Jewish nationality. In Moravia the numbers

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42 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 513.

43 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 49-50.

were different, because Moravia's Jews were more connected with Vienna than Prague. In 1921, only 15.71% reported Czechoslovak nationality, 34.85% German nationality and 47.84% reported to Jewish nationality. In 1930, the percentage of Jewish nationality rose by approximately 3%. Moravian Jews were not affected by the nationalist voice and moreover, German language was still primary for Jewish inhabitants of Moravia. Moravian Jews did not foresee the fascist threat of Germany, and were still favouring Germans.<sup>44</sup> According to the survey, in Vizovice, out of 3,039 inhabitants, 55 of them reported Jewish nationality, which was lower than in 1900.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 515-516.

<sup>45</sup> Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 270.

## 5 THE INTER WAR PHASE

After initial disorders, which accompanied the end of the war and the formation of Czechoslovakia, people were slowly returning to their former jobs and businesses. Jews were again running their distilleries and furthermore, the period between the wars was quite prosperous for the most well-known “trio” of alcohol-producing families, namely Jelínek, Singer and Weiss. These family businesses experienced changes. In 1921, Zikmund Jelínek retired and entrusted the business to his sons, Vladimír and Rudolf Jelínek. The two brothers did not see eye to eye and divided the business. Rudolf Jelínek bought a fruit company, while Vladimír Jelínek maintained the old distillery inherited from his father. Rudolf Jelínek established and expanded his distillery, e.g., in 1921 he requested a railroad connection and electricity for his company. Furthermore, Rudolf Jelínek started to distil kosher gin and plum brandy. Such steps helped Jelínek to penetrate the American market in 1934. The exports increased, peaking in 1937 when exports were valued at 375,000 Czech crowns. His successes were ended by the political crisis in 1938, because American Jewish importers refused to do business with companies from the anti-Semitic Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>46</sup>

Vladimír Jelínek did not settle for the small distillery that his father had left him in house no. 425, and in 1927 he built his own distillery near the railroad station.<sup>47</sup> Vladimír was more into political life than his brother. In 1927, he founded a local Jewish Party and received 79 votes during local elections, which gave him one seat for the Jewish Party on the local board of representatives. With this position came committee involvement, such as on the disciplinary committee, savings bank committee and school council.<sup>48</sup>

Karel Singer owned the first private distillery in Vizovice. In the 1920s he was already in his 60s and was not much into business expansion. Plus, his distillery stood in the centre of the town and was mostly hemmed in. Even so, in 1926, Singer bought a farmstead across the street and built a warehouse, garage and place for fermentation. He was a family man and was active in the community, even donating money for road reconstruction and a new bridge. Singer’s sons, Arnošt and Bedřich, were involved in the management of

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<sup>46</sup> Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 39-41, 47-48.

<sup>47</sup> Čižmář, *Dějiny a Paměti Města Vizovice*, 199.

<sup>48</sup> Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 42.

the distillery, while his middle son, František, earned a law degree from Charles University in Prague in 1924.<sup>49</sup> In the 1930s, Karel Singer was more supported by his sons, who helped him enlarge his business. Between 1933 and 1938, the number of his employees rose from 6 to 23. He copied the business plan of Rudolf Jelínek and started to distil kosher spirits mainly for export, but profits could never compete with Jelínek's business.<sup>50</sup> The fourth Jewish distillery in Vizovice was managed in 1920s and 1930s by Mořic Weiss. After his death in 1927, the distillery was inherited and managed by his sons Josef and Rudolf.<sup>51</sup>

Among other businessmen from the Vizovice Microregion, there were Emil Schrötter, the owner of a hardware store, and Samuel Bock, who owned and operated a tannery. Both of these businesses were inherited by sons, but they had to fight competition and did not prosper as did the distilleries. Many Jewish citizens relocated to bigger cities or foreign countries. The Strassmann family, one of the oldest Jewish families in Vizovice, slowly vanished. The family owned a pub, but the successor of Strassmann family worked as a lawyer in Brno. Another family that disappeared from Vizovice was the Frankl family. Emil Frankl, a jeweller, relocated his business to Vienna.<sup>52</sup>

In 1930, the "Jewish Party" disappeared from the political stage. Even though the party received non-Jewish votes, the name of the party probably did not appeal to everyone and furthermore, it was founded by prominent Jewish residents who tended more towards business life. Therefore, the party was transformed into the Non-political Economic Party. This party attracted businessmen and people with high social status. It was joined by non-Jewish members as well, but the management of the party was still in the hands of Jews such as Karel Singer, Vladimír Jelínek or Josef Weiss. In the elections of 1932, gentile lawyer Albert Bervid, representing the Non-political Economic Party, was elected mayor of Vizovice. Successors of the foremost local Jewish businesses also continued in political life like their fathers, and the everyday life of Vizovice society was important to them.<sup>53</sup> Along with other Jewish residents, they were members of many non-Jewish clubs such as

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49 Čižmář, *Národopisné a Životopisné Paměti Vizovic*, 243.

50 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 50-51.

51 Petr Pálka, *Židé a Morava: Sborník Příspěvků Přednesených Na Konferenci Konané 11. Listopadu 1998 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 1997), 119.

52 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 55.

53 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 24, 26.



volunteer firemen or Sokol. In 1935, Club Sion made a few renovations to the synagogue, adding a warehouse and clubhouse.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Klenovský, *Židovské Památky Zlínského kraje*, 105.

## 6 THE APPROACH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Great Depression, which began in 1929, brought negative economic, social, political and moral effects to countries around the world including Czechoslovakia. Industrial production dropped, leaving one million Czechoslovaks unemployed as well as six million Germans. This crisis allowed the National Socialist German Workers' Party, led by Adolf Hitler, to take control of Germany on 2 August 1934. Hitler promoted Nazism – hardline fascism. In 1935, Germany adopted the Nuremberg Laws, racist laws that started the systematic extermination of Jews and expelled them from political, social and economic life. Jews were deprived of human rights. They were banned from studying or holding certain types of jobs. They could not participate in public events or use public transportation. Jews were again marked – with a yellow star – and their material possession was confiscated. The peak of pre-war anti-Semitism came with the Crystal Night, an anti-Jew pogrom throughout Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland on 9 – 10 November 1935. Nazi Germany stepped out of the League of Nations, established conscription and prepared for war.

The unity of Czechoslovakia was endangered by Hitler's Germany. Several pro-German parties were founded, but they were on the edge of the Czech political scene until the 1935 parliamentary elections, which were won by the Sudeten German Party. After the reunion of Germany and Austria in 1937, Czechoslovakia prepared defences in order to stop Germany's advance to the east and to defend the Sudetenland from annexation by Germany. This conflict led to the 1938 Munich Agreement, orchestrated by Great Britain, which allowed Germany to peacefully occupy desired areas of the Sudetenland. Furthermore, Hitler supported the separation of Slovakia and the Czech lands as a means of weakening the Czechs. Slovakia declared autonomy on 14 March 1939, declared its inferiority to Germany and started to victimize Jews. On 15 March, German armies occupied Bohemia and Moravia, and on 16 March 1939, the Czech lands were renamed the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

Official statistics counted 118,310 Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Of these, 103,960 were of Jewish faith, while 14,350 were of Jewish ethnicity but not religion. Nazis in the Protectorate started to implement their plan to “solve the Jewish problem.” Jews were to be identified and separated in “ghettos without walls” through discrimination and the confiscation of their property, then finally sent to concentration camps

and exterminated. The steps before extermination were to be achieved not through brute force but as peacefully and orderly as possible through organized cooperation with administrators from the Protectorate and other authorities such as police or the German Reich bank. The main goal was to integrate the most profitable Jewish businesses into the German economy.<sup>55</sup>

The war Hitler soon declared on nearby countries was quite costly, prompting the need for new sources of income in the occupied countries. The Nazis looked to Jewish wealth as a means to fund their war, because approximately one-third of banking and industrial capital in the former Czechoslovakia belonged to Jews (17 billion Czechoslovak Crowns).<sup>56</sup> The Vizovice microregion was not known as an industrial region, but the income of Jewish distilleries in 1938 exceeded 10 million Crowns, with a working capital of 4 million Crowns and fewer than fifty employees.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Miroslav Kárný, "The Genocide of the Czech Jews," Pražský Hrad: Holocaust, [http://old.hrad.cz/kpr/holocaust/hist\\_zid\\_uk.html#2](http://old.hrad.cz/kpr/holocaust/hist_zid_uk.html#2) (accessed November 21, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 105.

<sup>57</sup> Śladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 50.

## 7 FORCED TAKEOVERS OF JEWISH PROPERTY

The citizens of Vizovice prepared for war thoroughly and founded a civil anti-aircraft force. The Jews of the Vizovice microregion did not have to wait until the occupation. Members of the National Union marched in Vizovice with the hand gesture typically known for Nazis, but no other provocations or attacks occurred.<sup>58</sup> Then, on 8 November 1938, the leader of the National fascist community encouraged non-Jewish citizens to drive Jews out of Vizovice and support fascism. Such encouragement went unheeded.<sup>59</sup>

In 1938, local elections were cancelled, and seats in the local authority were split among parties. Jews did feel the disturbance in Europe and resigned their social and political roles. Vladimír Jelínek ended his career in the town council after eleven years. As stated before, Jews were closely connected to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and many of them moved into Austria after the formation of Czechoslovakia. After the occupation of Austria in March 1938, Otto Weiss could not continue with his business and returned to Vizovice in May. Furthermore, Jewish inhabitants, especially Vladimír Jelínek and Josef Weiss, with their families, severed their Jewish connections and had themselves formally crossed out of the Jewish registry.<sup>60</sup> Emil Frankl and his wife also desired to return to Vizovice. He inherited a household from his parents, but visited Vizovice rarely because of his flourishing jewellery store in Vienna. In July 1938, Frankl contacted the town council and asked for permission to return to his house, no. 541. He characterized the worsening situation in Austria and the confiscation of his villa. The town council agreed to his request,<sup>61</sup> but several citizens of Vizovice disapproved of Frankl's return, because he had wed into a wealthy German family and had taken German nationality.<sup>62</sup>

On 16 March 1939, the war came to Vizovice when the town was occupied by Austrian forces. The Austrians were soon after replaced by an SS unit, probably because of the success of Jewish businesses in Vizovice, the revenues of which could not be overlooked.

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58 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 20.

59 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 72.

60 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 56.

61 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 168, fol 39.

62 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 75.

Soldiers were billeted in the local school; they did not behave aggressively, but they bought out stores and sent home packages.<sup>63</sup>

One possible way to escape the increasing anti-Semitism in the protectorate was emigration. Statistics state that in 1939, 19,016 Jewish emigrants left the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. By the end of 1940, another 6,176 Jews had emigrated. In 1941 and 1942 the numbers dropped to 817 in total. There were also unofficial ways to escape from the protectorate before the war, mainly by crossing the borders with Slovakia and Poland. It is estimated that around 30,000 Jews escaped this way, but how many were caught cannot be calculated, e.g., around 600 Czech Jews were sent to Auschwitz from France.<sup>64</sup>

Bedřich Singer was able to arrange a business trip to America. He left Vizovice on 5 March 1939, just a few days before its occupation. He then intended to transport his family, which in the meantime moved to Prague in order to obtain permission to emigrate. The prerequisite to emigrate required the sale of all property – in this case the distillery. Unfortunately with Bedřich Singer abroad, the distillery could not be officially sold and therefore the rest of the family did not get permission to leave the country. Rudolf Jelínek was also able to arrange a business trip to the United States. In his absence, the distillery was managed by his wife Irene and son Zdeněk. Jelínek prolonged his visit, probably in order to negotiate the emigration of his family. He was not successful. In the meantime, Irene Jelínková tried unsuccessfully to arrange one year scholarships in England for her sons. Out of luck, Rudolf Jelínek returned to Vizovice in October. Also Otto Weiss, who had returned to Vizovice from Vienna, tried to emigrate but did not succeed.<sup>65</sup>

The Nazi plan was to confiscate all Jewish property and manage their businesses. They knew that the Czech society and authorities would not take this step gently, and so they nationalized Jewish property.<sup>66</sup> In order to do so, Jews and their property were counted by the order of the Reich Protector, and all Jewish businesses were assigned Aryan guardians to oversee them. These legal guardians took over the companies and decided whether the business would continue or be liquidated. Most of the smaller businesses were liquidated. Of the four Jewish distilleries in Vizovice, only the business of Josef Weiss

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63 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 20.

64 Kárný, "The Genocide of the Czech Jews."

65 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 60.

66 Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 106-107.

obtained a Czech Aryan guardian. But even this step did not rescue the distillery, for the Reich Protector soon ceased its operations and terminated its license.<sup>67</sup>

Singer's distillery was administered by Johann Striegl. The enterprise survived several quality inspections. In 1941, with the Singers in Prague, the business was sold to a German named Pfeifer.<sup>68</sup>

The return of Rudolf Jelínek led to several inspections of his distillery, which was then controlled by authorities and the Gestapo. In 1940, Jelínek was imprisoned. He appealed his imprisonment, prompting German authorities to examine his preceding life in Vizovice. They requested information from the city council about Jelínek's behaviour, his residency and social life. The mayor of Vizovice responded kindly, depicting Jelínek as upright citizen with a good reputation and no complaints against him. Jelínek was released from prison.<sup>69</sup> The distillery was assigned an Aryan guardian and then sold.<sup>70</sup> Other Jewish businesses, such as the stores of Jindřich Steinhart and Eugene Weinstein, the tannery of Rudolf Bock or the hardware store of Emil Schrötter, were simply closed.<sup>71</sup>

On 22 October 1941, the Gestapo broke into house no. 417 owned by Josef Weiss and illegally confiscated 240 kg of flour, 20 kg of rice, 16 kg of semolina and several tins of food. This food was handed to the municipality and ordered to be distributed to poor people. Weiss appealed to the municipality with no response.<sup>72</sup> The municipality, with A. Bervid as mayor (member of the Non-political Economic Party) subordinated to the politics of aryanization of Jewish businesses in order to preserve interests of the city and the protectorate itself.<sup>73</sup>

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67 Petr Pálka, *Židé a Morava: Sborník Příspěvků Přednesených Na Konferenci Konané 12. Listopadu 1997 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 1998), 118.

68 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, City Council fund, i. n. 1243, parcel 797.

69 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 230.

70 Pálka, *Židé a Morava*, 118.

71 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 88.

72 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 216.

73 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 94-95.

## 8 THE COURSE OF THE FINAL SOLUTION

The first Vizovice Jew to die in a concentration camp was Otto Vogel, a dear friend of Vladimír Jelínek. Vogel was firstly transported to Uherské Hradiště and imprisoned for falsification. Instead of being released, he was transported to the Dachau concentration camp and died there on 26 April 1941.<sup>74</sup> Vladimír Jelínek was actively involved in the city management and therefore was not deported only for his Jewishness but also as a political prisoner. Jelínek was arrested by the Zlín Gestapo on 16 April 1940 and transported to Zlín. He was then deported to a concentration camp for political prisoners in Flossenbürg and died there on 10 June 1942. His wife, Ida Jelínková, wanted to transport his remains and bury them in the Jewish section of the Zlín cemetery but with no result. Also, no money from Jelínek's life insurance policy was paid during the war. The death of Vladimír Jelínek opened the eyes of his nephew Zdeněk Jelínek, who travelled undercover to Prague and joined the resistance. His parents endured several interrogations in Svatobořice.<sup>75</sup>

At the end of September 1941, a new Reich Protector, Reinhard Heydrich, arrived in Prague. His main goals were to Germanize the protectorate, eliminate resistance and start the Final Solution, the systematic extermination of Jews across the protectorate. No events in the protectorate or on the front could stop the deportation of Jewish inhabitants. From 16 October 1941, Jews were weekly transported mainly from large cities such as Prague, Plzeň and Brno. On 27 May 1942, Heydrich was assassinated. In a forceful response, 1,000 Jews were deported from Prague to Ujazdowo, Poland on June 10 and executed.<sup>76</sup> Among these Jews was Rudolf Weiss from Vizovice, who had moved to Prague in 1940. Another transport marked "AAs" deported elderly Jews from Prague to Terezín on 20 July 1941. Among them was Karel Singer, the founder of the first Jewish distillery in Vizovice, and his wife Štěpánka. A few months later they were joined in Terezín by the rest of the Singer family then living in Prague, namely Lota Singrová with son Tomáš and daughter Jana. On 26 October 1942, Karel and Štěpánka Singer were transported to Auschwitz and probably selected for extermination in a gas chamber because of their old

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74 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 96.

75 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 69-70.

76 Livia Rothkirchen, ed. *Yad Vashem Studies: Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority* (Jerusalem: Alpha Press, 1979), 312-314.

age.<sup>77</sup> The next acting Reich Protector, Kurt Daluege, continued the hunt for Jews, and full trains of Jews were leaving the protectorate every week.

Jews from the Zlín Region were collectively deported by three transports from Uherský Brod, with approximately three thousand Jews on board. The first transport on 23 January 1943 contained Jews from Kyjov, Uherský Ostroh, Zlín, Napajedla, Holešov, Vizovice and other minor cities. Jews from mixed marriages were spared from the deportation. Trains from Uherský Brod travelled to the Terezín Ghetto, and about one thousand of the Jews from these three transports were then forwarded to the Auschwitz concentration camp via a passenger train labelled “Cu.” It is assumed that the majority of this transport were killed upon arrival.<sup>78</sup>

From Vizovice were transported 36 Jews, from Zádveřice, the Elsner family and Jiří Jelínek, and from Slušovice, Mr. and Mrs. Winterstein. Rudolf and Irena Jelínek were transported from the interrogation camp. The Jews from mixed families were not included in the deportation group; therefore a few Jews stayed in Vizovice, namely the Weinstains. Hilda Holubová – a Jew that married the Catholic Jan Holub – was deported and held in internment in Uherský Brod without legal reason but then was set free in 1943. The life of Jews that stayed in Vizovice was not easy. They were mocked and discriminated against. They could not get proper jobs and were not allowed to travel. Josef Weinstein was sent to a work camp in Lípa, while Jan Holub was sent to a work camp in Postoloprty, which was built for non-Jewish partners of Jewish inhabitants. Eliška Weinstein – a gentile that married Jew Josef Weinstein – stayed in Vizovice with her six year old son Jan. Jan had to wear a yellow star and was mocked by German kids and kids from collaborationist families.<sup>79</sup> In 1944, Eliška Weinstein suffered without her husband and was forced to accommodate collaborator J. Bedřich, an inhabitant of Vizovice, who registered German nationality and was a member of the SS. The presence of a “traitor” in Vizovice attracted a partisan group that was active near the city. At the beginning of 1945, a member of the partisan group invaded the Weinstein house in order to kill Bedřich, but Bedřich was not there.<sup>80</sup>

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77 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 70.

78 Elen Sladká, “Den Památky Obětí Holocaustu,” Město Uherský Brod, <http://www.ub.cz/zpravy/Den-pamatky-obeti-holocaustu> (accessed March 30, 2016).

79 Sladkowski, “Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích,” 99.

80 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 21.



The wife and child of Vladimír Jelínek were sent to Auschwitz after one night in the Terezín Ghetto, along with the Frankl, Schrötter, the Weiss and Bock families. Other Jews from Vizovice were transported in 1944. Only a few Jews from the Vizovice micro-region survived the concentration camps, such as Nelli Altmanová, Olga and Františka Weinstein, and Jiří Jelínek. František Weinstein died on a death march at the end of the war.<sup>81</sup> Altogether, the Nazi concentration camps took the lives of 31 adults and 10 children from Vizovice.<sup>82</sup>

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81 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 99.

82 Commemorative plaque, Vizovice Elementary School, 1994.

## 9 JEWISH PROPERTY AFTER 1945

Vizovice was liberated 3 April 1945 by the Red Army together with a partisan unit, which operated near Vizovice. The Red Army stayed in public places but also in abandoned buildings. The local municipality was restored, and on 6 May 1945 agreed on securing the property that was confiscated or bought up by Germans.<sup>83</sup> Even so, soldiers of the Red Army plundered the local Jewish distilleries, as their victory over German forces allowed them to confiscate German property as war booty. Three of the largest and most profitable distilleries were then returned to Jewish hands. Because of the death of Rudolf Jelínek and Vladimír Jelínek and his family, Zdeněk Jelínek and Jiří Jelínek were supposed to inherit both distilleries. The distillery of Karel Singer was inherited by Bedřich Singer, the only successful emigrant from Vizovice. The distillery of Josef Weiss went to the state, as none of the Weiss family survived.<sup>84</sup>

The restoration of property proved difficult in the post-war years. Czech authorities were not overly sympathetic towards Jews seeking the return of their property. Jewish businesses were held under national management until rightful owners claimed their property. Josef Weinstein was assigned to manage the property of the Singer family and the Weiss family. However, his guardianship was short-lived. Weinstein got into a dispute with a Red Army officer over confiscated liquors. Shortly thereafter, Weinstein was removed as manager of the Weiss and Singer distilleries. The distillery of Karel Singer was nationalized on 8 March 1946. The rightful owner, Bedřich Singer, returned to Vizovice after being in exile from 1939, but he could not achieve restoration before the communist revolution in 1948.<sup>85</sup>

The Weiss distillery was assigned a new national administrator, Miloš Pšenčík, at the beginning of 1946. The business applied for recovery of its trade licence, but this application was rejected by local authorities. The Ministry of Agriculture then confiscated the property. The District National Committee appealed this confiscation, but proceedings were aborted by the communist revolution. The Weiss property was nationalized in 1948.<sup>86</sup>

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83 Moravian Land Archive in Brno, State District Archive Zlín, Vizovice city fund, i. n. 21.

84 Pálka, *Židé a Morava*, 118-119.

85 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 81-84.

86 Pálka, *Židé a Morava*, 119-120.

The distillery of Rudolf Jelínek was repeatedly plundered, first by the retreating German army and then by the Russian Red Army; together they stole property valued at 1,100,000 Czechoslovak Crowns. Zdeněk Jelínek became state administrator of the distillery, as the business was returned to the deceased Rudolf Jelínek. The firm was well known for its product in the pre-war years and therefore was supported by authorities. In the summer of 1945, the distillery returned to operation. The distillery received 500,000 Czechoslovak Crowns from the Ministry of National Defence as compensation for the plundering by the Red Army. The Ministry of Industry and Trade of Czechoslovakia arranged the export of liquors to the United States, including kosher liquors. The distillery of Rudolf Jelínek took only one year to return to peak form. In 1946, Zdeněk Jelínek died of tuberculosis, and his successor, Jiří Jelínek, was a minor. This complicated matters because he could not manage the distillery, which was ultimately superintended by others. Jiří Jelínek became an adult on 16 December 1949, just in time to see his property nationalized.<sup>87</sup>

Nor did the distillery of Vladimír Jelínek escape plundering. The distillery was occupied by the Red Army for several hours after the liberation of Vizovice. Soldiers were celebrating the liberation of “liquor city,” and in the process confiscated litres 5,687 litres of alcohol, radios, typewriters and even a piano. The total loss was estimated at 1,135,000 Czechoslovak Crowns. As in other distilleries, the management of the enterprise handed a statement of losses to the Ministry of National Defence and received 450,000 Czechoslovak crowns in 1947. The main problem for the distillery of Vladimír Jelínek was the acknowledgment of inheritance. Zdeněk Jelínek and his brother submitted a request that would allow them to manage the distillery until the problem of inheritance was solved. However, the employees did not want Zdeněk Jelínek to manage their distillery, as he owed a rival business, so the managerial post was temporarily given to Antonín Palán, an employee from the distillery of Vladimír Jelínek. During the inheritance proceedings, many applicants declared their right to inherit the property of Vladimír Jelínek, among them distant family members from Palestine, Australia and China. These events got the

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<sup>87</sup> Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 73-77.

distillery placed on a list of Jewish businesses to be confiscated by the city council. The distillery was then nationalized.<sup>88</sup>

The Israeli club Sion was officially re-established in 1945 by Josef Weinstein. But the Holocaust so devastated the Jewish society of Vizovice that few thought of renewing their previous religious life. There were not enough men to create a minyan – the smallest number for religious service. The synagogue was given back to Sion, but the club could not finance it, and the synagogue was then used by scouts. After the communist revolution in 1948, Sion was not able to manage the building and sold it to the city. This action completely ended Jewish religious life in the Vizovice microregion. In 1950, the synagogue was turned into a residential house. It was again renovated in the 1980s, during which the semicircle window with etched decalogue was removed and given to the Brno Jewish community.<sup>89</sup>

The houses Jews inhabited before the Second World War were given back to them, but the city council expressed interest in the abandoned houses and tried to take ownership. House no. 137 was given back to sisters Nelli Altman and Olga Weinstein after their return from Auschwitz. They briefly lived with Josef Weinstein and then moved to Brno. The house started to decay after their departure, and therefore the estate was sold to the city council in 1962. Hilda Holubová inherited house no. 140 in 1949, but this property suffered a similar fate and was sold to the city in 1967. The houses of the Weiss family were not nationalized with the distillery. Rudolf Weiss bequeathed his property to Gizele Tučková. Josef Weiss did not have a will, and therefore his inheritance was expropriated by the state. The house of Emil Schötter was inherited by his brother Karel, but the District National Committee transferred possession of the house to the state. The house no. 425 of Vladimír Jelínek was nationalized and has been used by the city since 1957. Other Jewish houses belonging to the Bock, Frank and Weinstein families were sold.<sup>90</sup>

The 1948 communist revolution again changed Jewish life. All distilleries were nationalized. Bedřich Singer returned to Chile, where he lived during the war. He was no longer able to live in a city that reminded him of his lost family. Jiří Jelínek continued to

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88 Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 77-80.

89 Pálka, *Židé a Morava*, 78.

90 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 130-131.

work in the distillery, but only as a common employee. He and his wife Irena Jelínek legally immigrated to Israel in 1949. One of the few reminders of Jewish life in Vizovice was the R. Jelínek distillery, which exported its product to the United States, Australia and countries of Western Europe. The distillery was responsible for exported 85% of national liquor exports in the 1960s. In 1974, the distillery of K. Singer ceased operation and was used as storage space for the R. Jelínek distillery.<sup>91</sup>

Sion folded shortly after the loss of the synagogue in 1950, mostly because there were only two living adult Jews in Vizovice: Josef Weinstein and Hilda Holubová. The death of Weinstein in 1961 left Hilda as the last local Holocaust survivor. She died in 1973. Children of Josef Weinstein remained in Vizovice and fully integrated into the communist society. Jan Weinstein worked at the local agricultural cooperative and became its chairman in 1966. He committed suicide in 1980. His sister Eva was born after the war and worked in several non-profit organizations in the Zlín Region, ultimately becoming the head of the orphanage in Vizovice. The daughter of Hilda Holubová, Jitka, worked as teacher in Vizovice.<sup>92</sup>

During the communist regime, Jews were again discriminated against. The most known example is the purge of Jewish officials, including Rudolf Slánský, from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. During the trials associated with this purge, several Jewish officials were condemned to death and hundreds were arrested. The Communist Party had embraced atheism, making the Jewish religion unacceptable. In 1967, Czechoslovakia stopped supporting emigration and the supply of weapons to Israel. Any hope for improvement ended in 1968 with suppression of the Prague Spring. Jews were not allowed to publish religious literature, and religious activities were strictly controlled. Furthermore, one of the directors of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was murdered in Prague during his visit in August 1987. Jewish life came back to normal state after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The country renewed diplomatic contact with Israel in 1990 and the republic again returned to democracy. Jews were allowed to establish Jewish schools, and activities of clubs and associations were renewed. In 1991, the Federation of

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91 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 123-124.

92 Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 132.

Jewish Communities in Czech Republic was founded. Jews were finally able to live peacefully after 60 long years of oppression.<sup>93</sup>

Such anti-Semitism did not affect the people from Vizovice. After the Velvet Revolution, city authorities and common people still had in mind the once-thriving Jewish community in their town, so they placed a plaque in the school that commemorated the 41 Jewish Holocaust victims from the Vizovice microregion. (See Picture 6)

The last remnant of this community in the Vizovice microregion is the R. Jelínek Distillery, the country's largest producer and exporter of plum brandy. Once a year, a rabbi visits the distillery to affirm and accredit the process of distilling kosher vodka and slivovitz. One nod to the Jewish origins of Jelínek is the Star of David that can be seen on the R. Jelínek cash register in the distillery's concept restaurant in nearby Bunč. (See Picture 7)

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93 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 353-358.

## CONCLUSION

The main objectives of this thesis were to chart the development of the Jewish community in the microregion of Vizovice and to determine whether the Jewish inhabitants were discriminated against, and if so, for what reasons. Evidence suggests that Jews in the microregion of Vizovice generally prospered over time. The four largest businesses in Vizovice were operated by Jews, who parlayed their business successes into active involvement in local society and politics.

During the Second World War, local Jews were hunted down and their property was confiscated. The most active of them, Vladimír Jelínek, became a political prisoner. Nazis incorporated local Jewish businesses into their war machine, under the management of Aryan guardians. In 1943, Jews from the Vizovice microregion were transported to concentration camps; only four survived.

With the end of war, Jewish property was supposed to be returned to its rightful owners, but the authorities were resistant. The communist revolution led to nationalization, preventing the restoration of Jewish businesses. The city authority then took ownership of Jewish houses. Ultimately, those few Jews who survived the Holocaust as well as relatives of Jews who did not, were, in most cases, unable to regain their property and recoup their losses. The Holocaust in effect destroyed forever the Jewish community of the Vizovice microregion, and the city profited and continues to profit from the assets the community left behind. The plaque in the elementary school is a nice touch, but is it really enough?

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<sup>94</sup> Jaroslav Klenovský, *Židovské Památky Zlínského kraje*, 105.

<sup>95</sup> Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 202.

<sup>96</sup> Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 202.

<sup>97</sup> Sladkowski, *Království Slivovice Aneb Osudy Palírníků ve Vizovicích*, 202.

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**PICTURES**



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6



Picture 7

**APPENDIX A: POPULATION OF JEWS IN VIZOVICE<sup>99</sup>**

Year	Population of Vizovice	Jews
1662	-	1 family
1750	-	2 families
1850	2723	approx. 20
1857	-	17
1869	2717	48
1880	2668	46
1890	2634	58
1900	2705	74
1910	2760	67
1921	3039	55
1930	3337	46
1939	3750	50
1942	3907	38
1946	3458	7
1950	3567	2
1970	3686	1
1980	4309	3*
1991	4350	2*

\*Jews from mixed marriages.

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<sup>99</sup> Sladkowski, "Dějiny Židů ve Vizovicích," 130-131.