

The Socioeconomic Motives for the Holocaust in Kroměříž, Moravia

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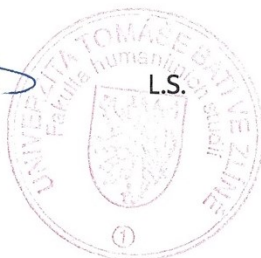
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na židovskou obec v Kroměříži a socioekonomické motivy, jež vedly jak ke zničení této části města, tak i k hrůzným osudům místních židů během druhé světové války. První polovina práce popisuje vývoj židovské obce v Kroměříži a změny poměrů židovského obyvatelstva ve společnosti od 14. století do počátku 20. století. Druhá část zkoumá průběh holocaustu s cílem určit, jaké sociální a ekonomické motivy k této události vedly. Práce dokazuje, že drtivá většina židovské populace v Kroměříži byla během nacistického režimu zbavena všeho, co měla, nakonec i svých holých životů. A přestože byl vztah mezi Židy a ostatním obyvatelstvem města přátelský, Holokaust v rukou Němců byl nezastavitelný. Na závěr tato práce poskytuje informace o židovské obci v Kroměříži po válce a také o současné židovské aktivitě ve městě.

Klíčová slova: Židé, Češi, Němci, Kroměříž, Morava, antisemitismus, nacisté, druhá světová válka, holokaust, restituce

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis focuses on the Jewish community in Kroměříž, Moravia and the socioeconomic motives leading both to the destruction of this community and its residents during World War II. The first half of this thesis describes the development of the Jewish community in Kroměříž and the changes in the Jewish society from the fourteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. The second part examines the course of the Holocaust to determine what social and economic motives led to this event. It argues that during the Nazi regime, the vast majority of the Jewish population of Kroměříž were deprived of everything they had, and eventually of their lives. And even though the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in the city was friendly, the Holocaust at the hands of the Germans was unstoppable. Finally, the thesis provides information about the post-war Jewish community in Kroměříž and also about the current Jewish activities in the city.

Keywords: Jews, Czechs, Germans, Kroměříž, Moravia, Anti-Semitism, Nazi, Second World War, World War II, Holocaust, Restitution

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout Kroměříž's history, the Jewish community, albeit comparatively small, could not be taken for granted. Although Jews first inhabited the Czech lands in the ninth century, Kroměříž did not receive its first Jewish residents until the fourteenth century. Since then, the Jews of Kroměříž went through truly tough times, during which they had to face racial discrimination and frequent, mostly harsh attempts to marginalise them socially, economically and personally. Even so, the Jewish community in Kroměříž thrived, becoming the most important Jewish settlement in Moravia. However, with the onset of Nazism and introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, the lives of Jews in Moravia steadily worsened, and Kroměříž was no exception. Kroměříž's Jews lost everything they owned as well as what they never expected to lose – their identities, and then their lives. This thesis charts the course of events leading to the Holocaust and the total disappearance of the Jewish community in Kroměříž. Despite differences in religion and customs between Kroměříž's Jews and other inhabitants, there was never much animosity between them. True, anti-Semitic incidents occasionally happened, but they were not as severe as those in other Moravian cities, such as in nearby Holešov. The “final solution” enacted by the Germans during World War II was ultimately successful in Kroměříž; the Jewish community there is now just a memory, marked by stone memorials and an annual academic conference.

1 DEVELOPMENT OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN KROMĚŘÍŽ

1.1 The Beginning of Jewish Settlement

Konrad I was elected bishop of Olomouc in July 1315. He owned four cities – Svitavy, Mohelnice, Kroměříž and Vyškov. The first written reference to Jews in Kroměříž (German *Kremsier*) comes from 1322 when King John of Luxembourg (1310–1346) granted Bishop Konrad the privilege of keeping one Jewish family in each of his four cities. These families would be subject only to the bishop and his church, and not to the so-called “Jewish shelf,” by which the Czech monarchs had the exclusive right to hold Jews (*servi camerae regiae*) and benefit from their trades. As a result, Jews in Kroměříž were then governed by their laws and were subject directly to the bishop.¹

There is no specific evidence about how many Jews lived in Kroměříž in the fourteenth century, but the population was growing, evidenced by the fact that at the end of the century Jews had their lanes in the eastern suburbs Oskol, behind St. Mary's Church. One lane, at the end of which was a small gate, led to train station Oskol. Another was parallel to Moravian Street, with houses right next to the city walls. At the church, the Jewish lanes were closed and locked every night, blocking access. Despite this impediment, the Jewish community apparently thrived, as it included a synagogue, grocery stores, and shops that sold imported goods, spices, crafts and raw material needed for craftsmen.² Clearly, the bishop treated his Jews somewhat fairly, for the Jews of Kroměříž were doing better than Jews in royal cities.

In 1432, the bishop lost control of township Kroměříž to Moravian rulers. With this, the Jews of Kroměříž were the first in Moravia to become the property of noblemen. These Moravian noblemen tried to make use of their Jews' diligence and business skills. Under their rule, the number of the Jewish communities in Kroměříž at least doubled. Albert II of the Habsburgs (Albrecht II. Hasburský) and his son Ladislaus the Posthumous (Ladislav Pohrobek) never liked Jews. Albrecht expelled Jews from Jihlava in 1426 and his son expelled Jews from the Moravian King's cities – Brno, Olomouc, Znojmo, Uničov and Jihlava (again) in 1454. With this, many Jewish refugees made their way to Kroměříž, which was not under the King's rule. As a result, Kroměříž became the most numerous and the

¹ Jaroslav Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže* (Kroměříž: Pálková, 1996), 3.

² František Václav Peřinka, *Dějiny města Kroměříže I.* (Kroměříž: Obecní rada, 1913), 80.

most important Jewish settlement in Moravia, earning it the nickname “Hana’s Athens.” The Jews of Kroměříž still were not equal. They had to pay high taxes, so-called *Schutzdukaten*. In 1606, Cardinal Dietrichstein confirmed and multiplied their privileges, which included living in houses on the Jewish streets and having a synagogue.³ In that year, more than 25 Jewish families lived in Kroměříž, occupying 27 houses. Later on, in the seventeenth century, Jews gradually settled in the eastern corner of the walled township and created a settlement district with its centre between two streets: Velká and Malá Židovna (now Moravcova Street and Tylova Street).⁴ At that time, Jews were mainly engaged in trade, money lending, but also in skilled positions such as butchers, bakers, shoemakers, tailors, tanners, potters and glaziers. They also worked in distilleries.⁵

1.2 The Township after the Thirty Years' War

The good times ended abruptly during the Thirty Years' War on 26 July 1643, when Swedish troops, under the direction of General Tortensson and with the support of the Moravian Walachians, broke the town walls, entered the township and attacked the Jewish streets. Of the 27 Jewish houses in the town, 24 were located on these streets. These 24 houses were destroyed and approximately seventy Jews, including the rabbi, were killed.⁶ The synagogue was plundered and then burned and with it the sacred Torah scrolls.⁷ The surviving Jews fled. In January 1644, the town council asked Bishop Leopold Wilhelm not to allow Jews to return. However, the bishop refused and in 1649 ordered Jews to return and rebuild. In 1656, Kroměříž fell victim to a great fire, in which the rebuilt synagogue was again destroyed, along with eight Jewish houses. Afterwards, however, the economic situation of the township improved, and with it the plight of the local Jewish community.⁸ In 1670, Kroměříž, with the permission Bishop Charles of Liechtenstein, became home to eight Jewish families who had been expelled from Vienna due to accusations of alliances with Hungarians and Turks. Among the new inhabitants were significant scholars, traders and many skilled craftsmen, all of whom were wealthy in comparison, a fact which led to some discord within the community.⁹ According

³ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 3-6.

⁴ Petra Večeřová, *Židovské památky v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Prague: Olympia, 2009), 219.

⁵ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 4.

⁶ Večeřová, *Židovské památky v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 219.

⁷ Adolf Frankl-Grün, *Geschichte der Juden in Kremsier* (Breslau: S. Schottlaende, 1896), 98.

⁸ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 6-7.

⁹ Tomáš Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě* (Prague: Sefer, 2001), 87.

to the contributory list from that year, Kroměříž was home to 73 Jews, among them 36 “locals” and 37 “Viennese.”¹⁰ A third synagogue was built in years 1689-1693. A plague struck Kroměříž in 1715-1716, killing a tenth of the inhabitants. Even so, in 1717 the local Jewish community still consisted of 36 houses. However, in 1742, this number was reduced when Prussian soldiers sacked Kroměříž and demolished many properties.¹¹

¹⁰ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 6.

¹¹ Večeřová, *Židovské památky v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 219.

2 JEWS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

2.1 Beginning of Anti-Semitism and Laws of Charles VI

The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed an increase in anti-Semitism. King Charles VI (1711–1740) proposed that all rural Jews who came to the country after January 1618 should be expelled and those remaining should be divided into urban ghettos. However, the Czech parliament refused because such an intervention would harm the economy. Anyway, Charles VI issued government regulations in 1726 and 1727 which prohibited rural Jews from moving into Prague, and all Bohemian and Moravian Jews were forced to move into ghettos. Moreover, with the regulation *numerous clausus*, he defined the exact number of the Jewish families, which could not be exceeded. Consequently, in Moravia could live 5,106 Jewish families, and in Kroměříž could live only 106 families.¹²

For the regulation to be observed, the natural increase of the Jewish population was regulated with the so-called *family law (famiantský zákon)*. From September 1726, married or widowed male Jews with descendants were considered as fathers of a family, and so they gained *incolate*, which gave them citizenship in the monarchy. After the father's death, the number of his *incolate* was passed on to the oldest son who, as the only one in the family, was allowed to get married. If other male descendants wanted to get married and start a family, they had to leave the country. Families with only male descendants were considered to be extinct, and girls were also forced to leave the country and marry abroad. Breaking this law was punishable by whipping and expulsion from the country. Also rabbis were punished when they performed secret weddings. Some had secret weddings abroad, for example in Poland or Hungary, where the law did not apply. Another significant intervention into Jew's lives was the emperor's so-called *translocation transcript* issued in December 1726, which ordered Jews to move into separated streets and districts located far from Catholic churches, cemeteries and places where religious processions went through.¹³

As a direct result of the laws, official anti-Semitism in Kroměříž was enacted in 1727-1728 by the strict separation of the Jewish quarter from the other parts of the township. Jews could enter only through one gate and had to pay a fee. The accumulated hostility of the

¹² Večeřová, *Židovské památky v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 219.

¹³ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 90-106.

burghers towards Jews increased after the occupying Prussian troops departed (the Jewish township gained protection from the Prussians, and therefore it was not plundered by the troops) in 1742. On 13-14 April 1742, the inhabitants of Kroměříž attacked and plundered the Jewish quarter and killed three Jews.¹⁴

2.2 Bohemian Crow Lands under Reign of Maria Theresa

The reign of Empress Maria Theresa, 1740 – 1780, was exceedingly strict against Jews. After losing the war with Prussia over Silesia, she responded to the defeat and loss of her Silesian territory by turning her back on Czech Jews. The empress was a Catholic with a strong antipathy to the Jews, and she came to the conviction that Prague Jews were engaged in spying on behalf of Prussia. Her antipathy was further supported by the fact that Jewish ghettos had been in a long-term financial crisis and owed money to the royal treasury, making Jews a suitable scapegoat. As "retaliation" in January 1745, she ordered Jews to be expelled from Prague and then from the whole Habsburg lands and gave them only 45 days to move out of the Prague Jewish quarter, and only six months to leave the territory. It turned out that Maria Theresa's decision harmed not only Jews but the empire itself. After Jews left Prague, the town's economy quickly deteriorated. Wholesalers were looking for new centres in the countryside, and Prague was in danger of becoming poor because the economic life of Prague was mostly dependent on the functioning financial and commercial businesses of the Jewish ghetto itself.

In May 1748, an assembly was convened in Prague, and during negotiations about taxes, the attendees insisted the empress allow the return of the Jews she had expelled. In September, she backtracked and allowed the return of all Jews, regardless of class. The permission was supposed to be valid for ten years, with the only condition being the so-called *tolerance tax (toleranční daň)*, Jews had to pay to stay. Clearly, the empire needed not only money but also the business and organisational skills of its Jewish inhabitants. The expulsion had an enormous impact on the inhabitants of the Prague Jewish quarter. After three and a half years of exile, they returned to ruined and ravaged houses, and they had to restore disrupted business relations. The once-rich Prague ghetto became poor. After ten years, in 1758, the empress again allowed Jews to stay.¹⁵

¹⁴ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 7.

¹⁵ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 98-117.

Another but smaller pogrom in Kroměříž happened in April 1774 in connection with a death of a girl, Josefa Trnečková, in Holešov's ghetto on March 30.¹⁶ The girl's body was found in the house of a Jew, Abraham Aron. Based on reports, five Jews were arrested and imprisoned in Špilberk, in Brno. However, after the interrogation, their innocence was proven. Ultimately, only Aron was supposedly guilty, and he was sentenced to death and executed on June 4, 1774. As a result of this event, a pogrom on Jewish inhabitants occurred not only in Holešov, but also in Kroměříž and Vsetín. Violence in Kroměříž broke out six days after the murder in Holešov, and the Jewish city was again plundered. Eight looters from surrounding villages were arrested, tried, and sentenced to five lashes of the whip in front of the town hall and to a half-year of forced labour.¹⁷

2.3 Joseph II and Beginning of the Emancipation of Jews

The real change in the status of the Jews came during the reign of Joseph II (1780-1790), who wanted to make Jews more useful to the state. In the course of his reign, he issued a series of tolerant patents and regulations concerning Jews, initiating a process that led to further Jewish liberties in 1848-1849 and later to their civil emancipation in 1867.

Primarily, Jews were relieved of the obligation issued in 1215 to wear a distinctive sign on their clothes. In the economic arena, they were allowed to operate all crafts and trades again, to establish guilds and factories (except for buying and owning a land), to visit the royal cities including during markets, and to even live and eat with Christians under one roof. Even the ghettos were abolished.

All of Joseph II's reforms related to Jews were summarised through the so-called *Systematic patent* of 1797, which came into effect after the Revolution of 1848. By the patent, the number of permitted Jewish families in Bohemia and Moravia slightly increased, the amount of the tolerance tax was concretely defined, and the conditions for marriages of the oldest sons were set (they had to provide a certificate demonstrating an adequate knowledge of the German language). Furthermore, Jews were not allowed to move without permission. If they wanted to move somewhere within the empire, they had to pay a fee amounting to 10 percent of the value of their assets, and in the case of moving abroad, it was 20 percent.¹⁸

¹⁶ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 7.

¹⁷ Roland Schwartz, Příspěvek k dějinám Židů v Holešově, in *Věstník Okresního muzea v Kroměříži*, 8, 1965. (Kroměříž: Okresní muzeum, 1965), 72-73.

¹⁸ Miloš Pojar, *T.G. Masaryk a Židovství* (Prague: Academia, 2016), 128- 130.

2.3.1 German as a Lingua Franca

As Jews began to be subject to compulsory military service, they had to abandon the Hebrew language in business, public and official correspondence in favour of German. They also had to adopt new German names. In the field of education, all larger Jewish towns had to establish their own German-Jewish schools, where German was compulsory. And, Jews could only study at high schools where German was the language of instruction. Thus occurred the Germanization of the Jewish people in the Czech lands.¹⁹

¹⁹ Miloš Pojar, *T.G. Masaryk a Židovství*, 129.

3 ON THE ALTAR OF FREEDOM

3.1 Revolution of 1848

The Revolution of 1848 represents another significant milestone on the path of Jewish equality. It brought the abolishment of the *family law*, the *numerous clausus* for rural Jews, and of the *incolat*, *tolerance taxes* and even ghettos. Jews thus gained freedom of movement and settlement and also access to public positions (they could, for example, teach at state schools).²⁰ Kroměříž, as a first city of the monarchy, got permission to tear down the gates of the Jewish city. On November 22, 1848, a meeting of the Reichstag was held in Kroměříž castle, where five members, out of 883 the total, were even representatives of the Jewry. In the meeting, these Jews heard words like freedom, tolerance and equality.²¹ The second half of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century were characterised by an expansion of Jewish participation in social, cultural and economic spheres, thereby allowing them to contribute significantly to the overall development of Kroměříž.²² The process of Jewish emancipation culminated in 1867, when Jews achieved political and civil equality via voting rights, the right to acquire all property, and the right to operate any trade.²³

Back in 1848, the Jews of Kroměříž had some certainty of livelihood given to them in return for their obedience to the archbishop's government. Jews sold various goods, including spices, oil, cloth, woollen fabrics, glass, etc.²⁴ In 1849, the Jews of Kroměříž were no longer segregated from the rest of the city, and so the Jewish town was fully incorporated into Kroměříž. Jews also played an essential role in the local industry. Among the most successful companies in Kroměříž were, for example, Fäber's shoe factory, Schimmerl's factory, J. Brand's brush factory and Hirsch and Fall's malt-house.²⁵

²⁰ Pojar, *T.G. Masaryk a Židovství*, 132.

²¹ František Färber, „K historii židů v Kroměříži,“ in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 1995 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 1996), 98.

²² Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 8.

²³ Pojar, *T.G. Masaryk a Židovství*, 132.

²⁴ Petr Pálka, „Kroměřížská židovská náboženská obec a její stanovy z roku 1894,“ in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 1996 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 1997), 81.

²⁵ Pálka, „O důsledcích moderních postojů kroměřížských židů ve druhé polovině 19. století,“ in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 1997 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 1998), 82-84.

3.2 In Search of Identity – Jewish Assimilation

After the Revolution of 1848, Jews have faced another problem – how to keep their own Jewish identity in the face of German and later Czech social assimilation. Emancipated Jews, in order to adapt to the nations in which they lived, were deprived of their social and cultural traditions and adopted a different language. This process culminated in many of them converting to Christianity. In the binational Czech lands, Jews faced the important decision to side with Czechs or Germans.²⁶ Mainly those Jews who moved into small cities started to incline towards Czech. Gradually, many associations and institutions were established, supporting the idea of Jewish assimilation (e.g., the Czech Association of Jewish Academics). Other Jews, however, refused the idea of assimilation because they did not feel themselves Czech or German, and they instead inclined towards so-called Zionism. Such Jews strived for the establishment of Jewish culture and Jewish nationality. The first Zionist organisation called Zion was established in 1899, and in 1907 it began publishing the weekly Zionist magazine, *Selbstwehr*.²⁷

3.3 Jews in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

Opposed to the first half of the nineteenth century, when Jews became relatively equal to others, the second half was marked by worsening Christian-Jewish relations, the occurrence of various anti-Jewish incidents, and also by the spreading of rumours about Jewish ritual murders.

The first rumour about ritual murder in Kroměříž started in 1889 when Rabbi Adolf Frankl-Grün ordered his annual barrel of red wine. During delivery, however, some wine ran out of the barrel, and just a little mention among the railwaymen that they heard sobs from within the barrel, was enough for the rumour to spread throughout Kroměříž that there was a gentile girl inside at first sight dead. After being revived, she was supposedly held captive in the hospital by local Jews. A few days later, the fictitious case was published in a Catholic-oriented magazine, *Hlas*, under the heading "terrible shipment" ("*Příšerná zásilka*"). Frankl-Grün, however, reacted straight away and sent corrections to all the newspapers publishing stories of the case of the non-existent girl. The popular rabbi in Kroměříž thus prevented any riots that could have possibly arisen.²⁸

²⁶ Pojar, *T.G. Masaryk a Židovství*, 132-133.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

²⁸ Pálka, „O důsledcích moderních postojů kroměřížských židů ve druhé polovině 19. století,“ 74-75.

The anti-Jewish mood reappeared in October 1896. On the night of October 4-5, a maidservant of the family of Jewish businessman Josef Fischer, Františka Junášková, disappeared, allegedly with items stolen from the family. In the town, speculations about ritual murder quickly spread. The police began an investigation, and the press called for the arrest of the Fischers. After the girl was found hiding in a nearby guesthouse, she was arrested and imprisoned, but soon released. No apology to the Fischer family was recorded.²⁹

3.3.1 T. G. Masaryk and the Hilsneriade

In the Czech lands, modern racist-based anti-Semitism again appeared at the end of the nineteenth century. Against anti-Semitism stood the realism and pragmatism of Thomas G. Masaryk. He considered Jews as a nation, and therefore any kind of anti-Semitism was unacceptable. This idea was related to Masaryk's Christian convictions that neighbours should be loved and respected. In fact, at the Vienna Council in 1907, he said, "who has as his religious leader Jesus, cannot be anti-Semite (...) one or the other, a Christian or anti Semite!"³⁰

In 1899, Masaryk was pulled into an affair called the Hilsneriade. On April 1, a young Catholic woman, Anežka Hružová, was found dead in a forest near Polné. Soon after, a rumour spread that she was ritually murdered and drained of her blood by a Czech Jew, Leopold Hilsner. In September, the mentally weak Hilsner was tried and sentenced to death. Masaryk intervened in the case by writing a brochure, "The Necessity to Review the Polná Trial" (*Nutnost revidovati proces polenský*), rejecting the ritual murder superstition. In response, Masaryk was put on leave from his university, where he was a professor, and he faced a defamation campaign not only by German nationalists, anti-Semites and the press but also by the Czech anti-Semitic radicals. As a Jewish defender, Masaryk was widely and repeatedly portrayed as a traitor to the nation.³¹

When Masaryk was later running for parliament in May 1907, an anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic was conducted a campaign against him. There appeared a poster with a clear message: not to vote for Masaryk but for his opponent, Vilém Povondra, owner of a Kroměříž mortuary and printing press:

²⁹ Pálka, „O důsledcích moderních postojů kroměřížských židů ve druhé polovině 19. století,“ 79-81.

³⁰ Pojar, *T.G. Masaryk a Židovství*, 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31, 112 – 118. Hilsner was sentenced to life in prison but was released in 1918.

Earlier he was a German, and now he is pretending to be a Czech. He does not love his country or sons and daughters of Czech mothers. He defends the Jew Hilsner, who shed the blood of a Christian girl and shamed the entire Czech nation in Europe (...) Masaryk is a candidate for the Jews! Do you call Jews your friends? From whatsoever they were against our faith, against our language, against our nation. Whoever believes in Jesus, does not vote for Masaryk (...) vote for Vilem Povondra from Kroměříž.³²

Despite such anti-Semitism and political propaganda, the Czechs of the early twentieth century remained among the least anti-Semitic in Europe.³³

3.4 The First Republic of Czechoslovakia

On October 18, 1918 in Washington, DC, President Tomas G. Masaryk issued a Declaration of Independence according to which the new state was going to guarantee complete freedom of conscience, religion, speech and press:³⁴ “The rights of minorities shall be safeguarded by proportional representation. National minorities shall enjoy equal rights.”³⁵ On October 28, 1918, the new democratic state of Czechoslovakia was established. Then, it was not only about Czech Jews but about Czechoslovak Jews. The Czech National Committee submitted a memorandum recognising a Jewish nationality with minority rights as well as for state recognition of the religious community. In response, anti-Semitic demonstrations and looting took place. The harshest, three-day pogrom, happened in the Moravian town of Holešov, where soldiers from Kroměříž looted and destroyed Jewish homes and institutions. It was not, however, the last assault against Jews. In May 1919, there was a demonstration in Prague against high prices, and some Jewish shops were looted again.³⁶ With the new multinational Czechoslovakia was established, language again became a problem. Because language mainly affected spheres of education, culture and religious communal affairs, the Language Law was passed on February 29, 1920, setting the Czech and Slovak languages as official languages on an equal basis.³⁷ Concerning using minority languages, they could be officially used only in local governments, where the number of

³²Václav Bednář, „Čestný občan města Hranic – TGM – III. část,“ in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 2002 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2003), 229-230.

³³Pojar, *T.G. Masaryk a Židovství*, 31.

³⁴Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 26-27.

³⁵Aleš Brož, *The Rise of the Czecho-Slovak Republic* (London: University of Michigan Library, 1919), 8.

³⁶Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 27-28.

³⁷Václav L. Beneš, “Czechoslovak Democracy and Its Problems, 1918-1920,” in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 96.

speakers of such a language numbered at least one-fifth of the population.³⁸ However, membership in a language minority does not always correspond with membership in a national minority. That means that Jews could be recognised as a national minority even without using a language of their own such as Yiddish or Hebrew on a daily basis, as long as they regarded themselves as a nationality in their own right.³⁹

The Czechoslovak Republic was focused on industry and agriculture, whereas Jews were mainly employed in public service and certain professions – finance in particular. Only a minority of Jews (approximately 29 percent in Moravia) were engaged in industry and crafts.⁴⁰ In the first national census of 1921, Only 19,016 of the 45,306 Jews of Moravia-Silesia claimed Jewish nationality.⁴¹

³⁸Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia, vol. I.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1968), 193, 210-213.

³⁹ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 31.

⁴⁰ Jan Heřman, “The Development of Bohemian and Moravian Jewry, 1918-1938,” in *Papers in Jewish Demography, 1969* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press: 1973), 200.

⁴¹ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 27-29.

4 STEPS TOWARDS THE HOLOCAUST

Some Europeans in the early decades of the twentieth century considered Jews to be an enemy and a threat, who needed to be either converted, saved, expelled or killed.⁴² Adolf On September 16, 1919, Adolf Hitler defined Jews as a race and not as a religious community, characterising their presence as a “race-tuberculosis to the peoples,” and suggesting that the “ultimate goal must be the removal of the Jews altogether.”⁴³

4.1 Hitler and the Jews

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria in 1889, the son of a local official and anti-Semite. In 1924, he wrote *Mein Kampf*, in which he openly described his antipathy to Jews and even partly blamed them for Germany’s defeat during World War I.⁴⁴ “If at the beginning of the war, and during the war, 12,000 or 15,000 of these Hebrew defilers had been put under poison gas as hundreds of thousands of our very best workers from all walks of life had to endure at the front, then the sacrifice of millions would not have been in vain.”⁴⁵ Ultimately, Hitler’s extremist Nazi-brand of fascism created fanatics who viewed Jews not as the devil, as medieval Germans had done, but as bacilli or dangerous vermin.⁴⁶

To view the Jews as the cause of the German defeat in World War I was irrational. During the war, most young men were recruited into one army or another.⁴⁷ Jews served in every army, including the German army, and 125,000 were killed. After World War I, the Czech Jewry numbered 350,000.⁴⁸ In 1880, Kroměříž was home to 783 Jews (6% of the city’s inhabitants); in 1900, 611 Jews lived there (4%); in 1930, 382 residents of Kroměříž regarded themselves as belonging to the Jewish nationality (2%).⁴⁹ The Jewish population was on the decline due to a wave of Jewish emigration.

⁴² Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London: Fontana, 1987), 19.

⁴³ “Adolf Hitler Issues Comment on the ‘Jewish Question’,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/before-1933/adolf-hitler-issues-comment-on-the-jewish-question>.

⁴⁴ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (London: Phoenix Press, 1995), 471-472.

⁴⁵ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 772.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 473-476.

⁴⁷ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 23 -24.

⁴⁸ Gilbert, *The Holocaust*, 21-22.

⁴⁹ “Kroměříž,” Holocaust.cz, accessed March 2018, <https://www.holocaust.cz/zdroje/zidovske-komunita-v-cechach-a-na-morave/jiri-fiedler-zidovske-pamatky-v-cechach-a-na-morave/kromeriz/>.

4.2 The Rise of Nazism

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed German chancellor, and from that moment on, he could establish his personal and party dictatorship via a systematic attack on the Jews. Hitler used two forms of violence used against Jews, the first being the spontaneous, uncontrolled violence of the pogrom, and the second, systematic, legal and regulated violence expressed through issued laws.⁵⁰ The systematic persecution of the Jewish population, firstly in Germany, began with the unexplained arrest of many Jews. Around the country, posters appeared with the message for people to defend themselves against Jews and to boycott their business because Jews supposedly wanted to destroy the country. Jewish-owned shop windows were painted with the Star of David. On April 7, 1933, the legal status of racial diversity between German Jews and Germans was set. Non-Jewish Germans were given the status of “Aryans,” which basically meant “pure of race.” The unfair part of this was the fact that many German Jews were actually not Jews at all in their own eyes because many of them were only descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity a century ago. But Hitler had a clear idea about Jewish identity. According to him, it was only a question of race, of purity of their blood.⁵¹ Only seven weeks after Hitler took power, the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, opened his first concentration camp at Dachau.⁵²

On September 15, 1935, the discrimination gained in intensity and what more, it received its legal form. In Germany, two Nuremberg Laws were announced, and both were signed by Hitler personally. The first law “Reich Citizenship” set out the rule that citizenship could belong only to people with pure “German blood” and consequently, no Jew could be a member of the nation. The second law, “Protection of German Blood and German Honour” defined all Jews as being not of German blood, thus in the preservation of the Aryan, pure race, marriages between Jews and “pure Germans” were strictly forbidden.⁵³ Based on the Nuremberg Laws, millions of Jews were persecuted, deprived of property and eventually their lives.

On September 29, 1938, the Munich Pact was signed, and Czechoslovakia had to give the Sudetenland to Germany. By March 1939, the rest of Czechoslovak territory went

⁵⁰ Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 483.

⁵¹ Gilbert, *The Holocaust*, 33-46.

⁵² Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 485.

⁵³ “Nuremberg Laws,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed March, 2018, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007902>.

under Hitler's authority, together with 234,798 Germans, 6,458,357 Czechs and 44,798 persons of other non-German nationalities including 21,324 Jewish nationalities. The number of Jews was much larger, but many of them registered themselves as "other nationalities," including German. Under the pretext of the occupation which Hitler announced, President Hácha on March 15, 1939, signed "The German-Czech Agreement," allowing Hitler to legally occupy Bohemia-Moravia. Later on, Hitler stated his motives for the occupation as a necessity, because Czechs had been persecuting German minorities.⁵⁴

4.3 Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

As a result of the "German-Czech Agreement," on March 16, 1939, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was established as part of the German Reich. The Protectorate offered Nazis the perfect ground for the first racial state in modern history.⁵⁵ According to Hitler, one of the purposes of setting up the Protectorate was to secure "the national individuality" and "further peace and the social welfare of all," which obviously was only a part of his propaganda. In the Protectorate, three distinct groups of "races" occupied different legal positions, reflecting the racial hierarchy. Firstly, and the highest among them were apparently the Germans, next were the Czechs and at the very bottom were the Jews.⁵⁶ To increase the number of German citizens in the Protectorate, a law passed on June 6, 1941, declared that all German women married to a Protectorate citizen acquired German citizenship and also their possible descendants would acquire German nationality at birth. On the other hand, if German women married non-Germans, they as well as the children might lose their German citizenship. Czechs as the lower class became the "other inhabitants" and subjects of the Protectorate in their own country, which meant that they became the less important part of the population. Jews, like all the "other inhabitants," were subjects of the Protectorate, but they were also subject to discriminatory laws regarding personal status.⁵⁷

In June 1941, the Nuremberg Laws became valid in the Protectorate, and Jews were eliminated from the political, cultural and economic life of the society. In 1942,

⁵⁴ Gerhard Jacoby, *Racial State: The German Nationalities Policy in the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia* (New York: Institute of Jewish affairs, 1944), 12-21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, foreword, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-83.

Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich issued his own decree “For the protection of Czech blood and honour,” segregating Jews not only from Germans but also from Czechs.⁵⁸

The German language started to be dominant as the official language. In all German institutions, in public administration and all communications of the authorities, German was the exclusive language. Germans gradually put German names on towns, villages and public squares, and then the Protectorate government declared that the German names should be used exclusively in all cases.⁵⁹

4.3.1 Consequences of the Heydrichiade in Kroměříž

On September 27, 1941, Reinhard Heydrich was appointed Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. On May 27, 1942, in Prague, he was assassinated, dying of his wounds on June 4. This event unleashed hell throughout the Protectorate. In Kroměříž, an alarm went off, and roadblocks were built. The city was full of Nazi soldiers, and the Gestapo began random inspections of houses in order to find Heydrich’s attackers or guns.⁶⁰ The city police went from one house to another searching for people without personal papers, and those they found were led them to the Korso Café. According to the regulations, anyone without documents should have been immediately shot, but the police did not follow these orders. A search was also made for people who approved of the assassination. Stonemason Vincenc Bednařík from Kroměříž was arrested on June 1, 1942, by the Gestapo and executed three days later. On June 15, all Kroměříž citizens were forced to sign a statement guaranteeing that they did not participate in the assassination.⁶¹ Around the city, red posters began to appear with the names of the people executed for approving of the assassination of the Reich Protector and the threat that if the offenders are not found, every tenth Czech citizen will be shot.⁶²

⁵⁸ Jacoby, *Racial State*, 91.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 150-151.

⁶⁰ Ludvík Páleníček, „I Já Mám nač Vzpomínat,“ in *Válka ve vzpomínkách, Sborník sestavený ze vzpomínek občanů Kroměřížska: Kroměřížsko v kontextu II. světové války*. (Kroměříž: Knihovna Kroměřížska, 2015), 66.

⁶¹ Aleš Dubovský, *Kroměříž ve stínu hákového kříže* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 1995), 51.

⁶² Stanislav Zemánek, „Vzpomínky na válku v Kroměříži,“ in *Válka ve vzpomínkách. Sborník sestavený ze vzpomínek občanů Kroměřížska: Kroměřížsko v kontextu II. světové války*. (Kroměříž: Knihovna Kroměřížska, 2015), 97.

4.4 Restrictions against Jews

4.4.1 Social Restrictions

The District Office in Kroměříž on August 25, 1939, issued a decree restricting the rights of Jews, such as the prohibition of their access to restaurants, cafes, theatres and cinemas. Jews were allowed to go to the cinema only on Thursday and Saturday afternoon performances. They were forbidden to enter public swimming pools and spas, except for on Mondays. In public institutions such as hospitals, therapeutic institutions and sanatoriums, there had to be separate rooms for Jews. Jews were also prohibited access into parks. All the Jewish shops needed to be labelled by the sign: *Jüdischer Betrieb* (Jewish company), *Jüdisches Geschäft* (Jewish shop), or *Jüdische Unternehmung* (Jewish enterprise).⁶³ As of September 1939, Jews had to be off the streets by 8 p.m. In January 1942, a regulation forbidding Jews to enter main streets (*Vodní, Kovářská*) and squares (*Velké, Sněmovní*) in Kroměříž was issued. If necessary, Jews could visit those streets and squares only under the permission of the security authorities and under police supervision. Part of the ban was also forbidding any standing in front of churches, barracks, and public buildings. Any violations of these prohibitions were to be severely punished.⁶⁴

To simplify the process of Jewish isolation, in March 1940, Jewish identity cards were labelled with the letter "J" (*Jude*), and on September 19, 1941, the Jewish Labelling Regulation, marking Jews with a six-pointed black "Star of David" on a yellow ground with the inscription "Jude" came into force. Since then, all Jews six years of age or older had to wear this symbol on their left breast while in public.⁶⁵ This identification made for easier detection in case a Jew would be breaking regulations and also for demoralising them.

Starting in February 1941, the Jews of Kroměříž could only shop in Aryan shops between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. The shop owners had to place the signs outside informing Jews about this order. A so-called "ticket system" for food and clothing was also introduced. When someone in the family needed a new winter coat for example, the whole family had to contribute tickets to make it even possible. Other decrees ordered the force donation of eggs,

⁶³ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 9.

⁶⁴ Antonín Lukáš, „Začátky holocaustu v Kroměříži,“ in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 2005 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2006), 164.

⁶⁵ "Označování Židů," Holocaust, accessed March 2018, <https://www.holocaust.cz/zdroje/dokumenty/protizidovske-zakony-a-narizeni/protizidovska-narizeni-tykajici-se-oznacovani/>.

milk, grain, potatoes and, in short, everything the German army could need. A ban on foreign radio broadcasting was issued, except for German broadcasting, so the people had no information from abroad. A red label with this warning had to be attached to each radio.⁶⁶

The Germans issued a great number of laws and restrictions concerning the Jewish population. Most of the time, however, these were not published but were communicated orally to the former chairman of the Jewish community, Max Färber, and so there is little written evidence relating to the restrictions.⁶⁷

4.4.2 Economic Liquidation

The Protectorate economy adapted to the Reich's managed economy, and so the Reich had a standing legal right of supervision and intervention in all economic matters. In the March 16 Decree, the Czechs were promised "autonomous administration of its own affairs." Under this, the Reich took over the administration of the economy of the Protectorate.

In the Protectorate, legal tender came in many varieties. In the circulation were German, Czechoslovak and Protectorate types of money. The general monetary plan of the Germans was aimed for the devaluation of the Czech crown, putting the prices at the level of the Reich. Consequently, the Reich set the value of the Crown as 10 *Reichspfennigs*, which was way less than the Czech crown had been before. By this, Germans gained control over the banking system and had a way larger stock of crowns for further purchases within the Protectorate.⁶⁸

The "legal" confiscation of all private properties of Jews occurred under the so-called process of "Aryanisation." Jews were driven out of their jobs and apartments, and their property came into Aryan hands. They had to "register" their property and "deposit" their valuables, such as artefacts and jewellery. They also had to hand over radio receivers, depriving them of the opportunity to get any new information. They were not allowed to acquire or dispose of their property and businesses anymore. "Trustees" were appointed administrators of their businesses, and even their goods were "impounded." This amounted to the total expropriation of the Jews.⁶⁹ The Police Office of Kroměříž on December 14, 1940, submitted a property inventory of 211 Jews and 21 Aryan wives and "half-breeds"

⁶⁶ Antonín Hořčica, „II. Světová Válka (1939 – 1945),“ in *Válka ve vzpomínkách. Sborník sestavený ze vzpomínek občanů Kroměřížska: Kroměřížsko v kontextu II. světové války* (Kroměříž: Knihovna Kroměřížska: 2015), 24.

⁶⁷ Dubovský, *Kroměříž ve stínu hákového kříže*, 40-41.

⁶⁸ Jacoby, *Racial State*, 176-181.

⁶⁹ Holocaust, "Ghetto bez zdi."

living together with Jews in one household, of which 37 of them lived in their own houses, 50 in a rentals, 2 in a service flats, 2 in public housing, and 3 in flats of their Aryans wives.⁷⁰

Germans accomplished the economic destruction of the Jews. Their anti-Jewish laws were a direct means of taking over the ownership and economic power as such. Even non-Jews as partners, associates, or investors in firms subjected to the anti-Jewish laws because its definition of “Jewish enterprise” suffered.⁷¹ In a public commercial or limited partnership, the property was considered to be Jewish if at least one of the partners was Jewish. For businesses owned by a legal person, it was enough if a Jew was on the Board of Directors or the Supervisory Board, or if it was determined by a judge that the businesses were under the decisive influence of a Jew.⁷²

Despite the fact that no explicit detail in the property legislation was about what was to happen to the Jewish assets, the denial of the owner’s rights in relation to property amounted to complete confiscation and expropriation. The final and decisive move against the Jewish businesses was the Reich Protector’s ordinance of January 26, 1940 “for the elimination of the Jews from the Protectorate economy.” This decree prohibited Jews from economic participation in almost any form.⁷³ From then on, the Jews would be destitute and dependent.

From the end of May 1941, Jews of Kroměříž were evicted from their houses and flats and moved to a ghetto. Their new homes were dilapidated houses on Velká Židovna Street (currently Moravcova Street) where they were forced to live in unsuitable crowded conditions often together with other families. At the same time, an inventory of furniture, dishes, furnishings, dresses, duvets and books was made. From the ghetto, Jews were prepared for transportations, which took place between June 21, 1939, and July 6, 1942.⁷⁴ Their homes left vacant then became available to Germans. However, firstly, it was necessary to “establish the status” of all the Jewish property “registered” and “deposited,” the legal owner of which had not yet been determined. For this purpose, Heydrich issued ordinances empowering the transfer of such Jewish property to the “Emigration Fund.” With this, the confiscation of Jewish property was complete. The theft of this property received

⁷⁰ Lukáš, „Začátky holocaustu v Kroměříži,“ 164.

⁷¹ Jacoby, *Racial State*, 208-214.

⁷² Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 367.

⁷³ Jacoby, *Racial State*, 219-220.

⁷⁴ Pálka, „Helena a Emil Lvovi z Kroměříže: Příběh obětavosti v době holocaustu,“ in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 2002 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2003), 182-186.

its legal form by Nuremberg Laws issued on November 25, 1941, stating Jews living abroad lose their German nationality and their property was then forfeited to the Reich.⁷⁵

There is, however, no exact evidence about the amount of “Aryanised” property in the Protectorate. There are only some estimates, generally at least 20 billion Czech crowns. For the most part, the Czechs did not participate in the Aryanisation.⁷⁶ And it was no different in Kroměříž, because its gentile inhabitants had friendly relationships with their Jewish neighbours. In contrast, in nearby Holešov, Jews had their own independent political community, making the relationship more hostile. This led to local Czechs “helping” in the process of property Aryanisation.

⁷⁵ Jacoby, *Racial State*, 244-245.

⁷⁶ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 370.

5 FINAL SOLUTION TO THE JEWISH QUESTION

The depopulation of Jews within the Protectorate was the main purpose of the Nazis, and it became clearer by the day. Eliminating Jews from every aspect of the social, cultural and economic spheres simplified their aim. Central European Jews lived in a permanent state of a terror in the late 1930s.⁷⁷ The segregation of Jews into individual quarters made them not only readily available for deportation, but they also got used to forced labour and were often weakened by illness. In other words, segregation was the first step along a path to deportation to concentration camps and ultimate extinction.⁷⁸ At the Reichstag, on January 1939, Hitler openly declared that the Jewish race in Europe was not going to survive the next world war. Not long after, the German-Soviet Pact was signed, and the Second World War started.⁷⁹

When Hitler occupied Poland, he moved 600,000 Polish Jews, and later even all German Jews, into Polish labour camp and ghettos nearby railways, which brought him more than 900,000 manual workers for the German railway system. Railways were necessary because without them, the Holocaust would not have been possible as they allowed the Germans to position the Jews right where they wanted them.⁸⁰

5.1 Labour Camps

In 1941, special Jewish labour camps were established at Německý Brod and in the old prison-fortress Terezín (*Theresienstadt*). Jews were given only twenty-four-hour notice, and the weight of the luggage was limited to fifty kilograms per person. The belongings they chose to take with them were later searched by the Gestapo, for it was strictly forbidden to carry valuables, tobacco products and also any personal and family documents. The property left behind or confiscated was then “legally” transferred to the “Emigration Fund” of Bohemia-Moravia.⁸¹

The labour camp Terezín became the primary destination for most of the Jews from the Protectorate, including Kroměříž. From November 1941 to March 1945, 73,468 citizens of the Protectorate, mostly Jews, were sent by 122 deportation trains to the Terezín ghetto.⁸² There, the conditions were poor, and the health of even of the strongest ones was threatened.

⁷⁷ Haim Himmel Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 959.

⁷⁸ Jacoby, *Racial State*, 233-236.

⁷⁹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 140.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 490.

⁸¹ Jacoby, *Racial State*, 239-240.

⁸² Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 655.

The purpose was clear: to eliminate incapable individuals as fast as possible. Younger Jews were forced to build barracks for themselves. The aged were housed in blocks labelled "Reich Homes for Aged Jews," and despite the fact that these homes had their own medical services, they were poorly supplied. The food supply was no better. Labourers received just enough food to keep them alive. In June 1943, 48,800 Jews reportedly lived in Terezín, of which one-third were incapable of any work and the rest were forced labourers.⁸³

After the first transport on November 25, 1941, arrived to Terezín, the Jewish religious community in Prague was dealing with the authorities in connection with the possibility of correspondence between the Terezín prisoners and citizens of the Protectorate. By February 1942, written correspondence in German language and with a maximum length of 30 words was allowed to prisoners. Everything was censored. Furthermore, from September 24, 1942, prisoners were allowed to receive packages up to 2kg. In order to limit the contact, from July 10, 1943, Feld post stamps (German *Zulassungsmarke*, Czech *připouštěcí známka*) were introduced, which prisoners could send to their relatives in the Protectorate, to be placed on sent packages. Prisoners were usually allowed to request the stamps once every three months.⁸⁴ This system was used by a married couple from Kroměříž, Emil Lev and Helena Lvová. Some of the Jews from Kroměříž, before their transportation to Terezín, entrusted money to the couple so they could later send them something to the concentration camp. According to Helena Lvová, they sent approximately 194 packages, mainly food, to Terezín. The couple sent many packages even to people they did not know because they received their stamps to their address. They hoped the unknown recipients would share the food with other prisoners. Lvová was helped also by other Kroměříž locals who were asking her what they could add to the packages. Her husband Emil, was seized, and in September 1944 transported to the concentration camp Hagibor in Prague. From then on, Lvová did not send any more packages. Today, it is hard to calculate how many Jews survived Terezín thanks to their packages.⁸⁵ Undermining their efforts, at the end of June 1944, 7,000 Protectorate Jews were transferred to death camps in Poland and exterminated.⁸⁶

⁸³ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 240-244.

⁸⁴ Pálka, „Helena a Emil Lvovi z Kroměříže,“ 197-199.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 183-193.

⁸⁶ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 240-244.

5.2 Deportation of the Jews of Kroměříž

On September 1, 1939, František Färber was the first Jew of Kroměříž to be arrested by the Gestapo. He was transported first to Špilberk Castle and then to the concentration camp Dachau, and then after a month to Buchenwald, where he lived six years until the camp was liberated on April 15, 1945. On June 26, 1942, three hundred Jews from Kroměříž, among them almost sixty children and adolescents, were first deported to the collection station in Olomouc. There, they were temporarily housed in the building of today's elementary school on Hálková Street. At the end of the month, when the number of all Jews, also collected from other cities, counted nine hundred, they were deported to Terezín, where they stayed briefly before being transported to Auschwitz or Mauthausen, where most of them died.⁸⁷ Among Jews deported from Kroměříž, on June 26, 1942, were sixty-five Jewish patients from the mental hospital in Kroměříž, who were labelled as "not improving" taken away in a tin car with no windows. According to the Germans, they were going to "saponification" (German *verseifen*). Officially they were supposed to be transported to Brno for *Kultusgemeinde*, but hospital employees obviously knew what fate awaited these deported patients.⁸⁸ Not long after the transport from Kroměříž left in 1942, at the instigation of the government commissioner, Dr Humplek, the Jewish synagogue at *Komenského náměstí*, the most remarkable monument of Kroměříž's Jews, was plundered and demolished. The ruins were taken mainly by the citizens of Kroměříž as building materials for their own needs.⁸⁹

In September 1943, the younger and more proficient inhabitants of Terezín were mainly deported straight to death camps, but the fate of some was different, at least for a while. They were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau's so-called Family Camp. At this camp, they received unprecedented "privileges": on arrival they did not have to through the usual selection process, they did not have to have their heads shaved, the children were allowed to stay in the children's block during the day, and there was also no division of family members into different sections of the camp – therefore, "family" camp. Apart from these "privileges," which in some prisoners might have evoked certain hopes, the conditions were no different from other camps. The prisoners were suffering from hunger, cold, exhaustion and illnesses. After six months, the prisoners were told they were going to be relocated to the "Heydebreck Work Camp." However, instead of this fictitious camp, they were sent to Auschwitz, where

⁸⁷ František Färber, „Osobní vzpomínka na židovské kroměřížany 30.let tohoto století,“ in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 1999 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2000), 73.

⁸⁸ Pálka, „Helena a Emil Lvovi z Kroměříže,“ 182-186.

⁸⁹ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 8.

almost four thousand men, women and children were sent to gas chambers on the night of March 8 to 9, 1944. It is likely that the many of Kroměříž's Jews were among them. The extermination of the Family Camp represents the largest mass murder of Czechoslovak citizens during the Second World War.⁹⁰

The deportation to the concentration camps was classified as a transfer of residence beyond the Empire. In order to make the appearance of "resettlement" more credible, Jews often even had to pay for their transport. The deportation itself was a terrible experience. The conditions inside the cattle wagons were inhumane: no food, water, or toilets. Such unsanitary conditions often led to illness. As a result, many were dead on arrival at the camps. For those who survived transport, their horrors had just begun. As soon as they were unloaded, the selection process began, with SS officers choosing who was able to work and who was going to be sent directly to the gas chambers.⁹¹ After the labourers marked as "able to work" entered the camp, they were tattooed with numbers that replaced their names. Hitler stressed the importance of their extermination, so the SS experimented with various gases to determine which would kill the fastest. The most famous gas was Zyklon-B. The gas chambers were called "shower rooms," and the victims were ordered to undress for showers before being herded into a room and gassed in mass. With this gas, and with five "shower rooms," Auschwitz was able to murder 60,000 people per day.

In Europe, there were about 8,861,800 Jews in total under Nazi control, and approximately two-thirds of them were killed. Among the Jews of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the death rate was 70 percent. Most European Jews died in concentration camps. Auschwitz alone was responsible for the deaths of two million people, mostly Jews.⁹² When Jews died, Germans confiscated their possessions and distributed them among the armed forces or the German population. As a result, many German families had or have "souvenirs" from the Holocaust.⁹³

⁹⁰ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 655-656.

⁹¹ "Osvětim," Holocaust.cz, accessed March 2018, <https://www.holocaust.cz/dejiny/koncentracni-tabory-a-ghetta/osvetim/>.

⁹² Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 497.

⁹³ Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 498.

6 THE SITUATION AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

6.1 Liberation of Kroměříž

At the beginning of May 1945, signs of nervousness and confusion among Germans began to appear, and Kroměříž was ordered to build anti-aircraft shelters. Around the city, trenches were dug, and barriers were built mainly from the east, where the main attack of the Soviet and Romanian troops was expected. Germans started to demolish anything that stood in their way, such as a railroad station, railroad tracks and barracks. Many people on the night of 3 to 4 May slept in their cellars, and from the early morning of May 4, 1945, shelling was heard, and the Romanian army began to occupy the city. Street fighting took place, and German troops blew up the main bridge over the Morava River, the last remaining crossing. By 8 p.m. the entire right-bank side of the city was liberated. On May 9, 1945, the German army capitulated and left the city. On that day, in Masaryk Square, a celebration of the victory and the end of the Second World War took place. After the Romanians, Soviet troops arrived in the city and issued an order to restore the economic and cultural life. Citizens, with the help of Soviet soldiers, built a temporary bridge over the Morava River.⁹⁴ The trenches were filled, damaged houses were quickly repaired, and the shops reopened.⁹⁵

Although the city was spared from massive bombing, there was still significant war damage to houses and apartments, rendering over 110 residences uninhabitable.⁹⁶ More seriously, many Czech citizens, as well as Romanian soldiers participating in the expulsion of the Nazis from the streets of Kroměříž, lost their lives. Under the linden tree of liberty in Milic Square (*Milíčovo náměstí*), 31 Romanian soldiers were buried. The funerals of fallen citizens of Kroměříž took place at the local cemetery on 7, 8 and 10 May.⁹⁷

6.2 Jews of Kroměříž after 1945

The final number of the Holocaust survivors from Kroměříž varies, but approximately 20 Jews returned home. Of these, some only came back for their family photos or things hidden by their neighbours and then left the city. Others stayed a short time before finding

⁹⁴ Zdeněk Marek, „Vzpomínka,“ in *Válka ve vzpomínkách. Sborník sestavený ze vzpomínek občanů Kroměřížska: Kroměřížsko v kontextu II. světové války*. (Kroměříž: Knihovna Kroměřížska: 2015), 56-58.

⁹⁵ Lukáš, „Začátky holocaustu v Kroměříži,“ 52-59.

⁹⁶ Pálka, *Konec války v Kroměříži 1945 a role Josefa Žourka z Rataj, Vol. 1 (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2005)*, 41.

⁹⁷ Viktor Chrást, „Protektorátní Kroměříž,“ Bc. thesis, Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2010, 98-99; The Romanian soldiers were later disinterred and reburied in Brno.

work elsewhere and moving. Some Jews returned home in poor health, a consequence of their long-term imprisonment, and soon died. A few other Jews stayed in the city and were simply absorbed into the local populace.⁹⁸ The city chronicle of 1951 states that, during the Second World War, 92% of the Jews of Kroměříž were killed. The last surviving Kroměříž Jew was František Färber, who died in 2003.⁹⁹

After the Second World War, Bohemia and Moravia were home to approximately 15,000 Jews, most of whom were recent immigrants from Sub Carpathian Russia, which was annexed by the USSR in 1945. Currently, the Czech Republic is home to approximately 3,000 Jews, half of which live in Prague.¹⁰⁰

6.3 The Jewish Religious Community of Kroměříž

Those few Jews who survived the Holocaust attempted to renew the Jewish religious community. By the Decree of September 3, 1945, the National Committee in Brno approved the resumption of activities of the Jewish religious community of Kroměříž, and on September 21, 1945, the chairmanship of the legal committee was awarded to Ludvík Löwenthal, a Terezín survivor. The renewed religious community took over the property and competencies. However, Löwenthal and his family left the city in 1948 for the new nation of Israel, and with their departure, no one remained to continue the traditions or take care of the property. In 1949, the Kroměříž Jewish community officially ceased to exist, and the Jewish community in Prostějov took over its powers, jurisdiction and property ownership.¹⁰¹ In 1952, the Synagogue Corps (*Synagogální sbory*) was formed, and with it, the Kroměříž Jewish community was administered from Kyjov until 1960, and then from Brno. Before long, the corps was cancelled for the total loss of its members.¹⁰²

In contrast, in nearby Holešov, the Jewish religious community was renewed and its former chairman, Arnošt Michalovský, remained in the city and oversaw it until his death in 1962. He succeeded in arranging for the creation and placement of commemorative plaques in a ceremonial hall at the Jewish cemetery. These plaques identify the Jewish victims from Holešov and the surrounding area. No such memorial was made in Kroměříž. Although there

⁹⁸ Pálka, “Židé v Kroměříži po druhé světové válce – restituce obecního majetku,” in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 2016 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2017), 224.

⁹⁹ Pálka, “Židé v Kroměříži v roce 1942,” in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v roce 2014 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2015), 217.

¹⁰⁰ Pěkný, *Hitorie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 657-658.

¹⁰¹ Pálka, *Židé na Kroměřížsku po II. světové válce, referát z konference Židé a Morava konané v listopadu 2017*, forthcoming.

¹⁰² Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 8.

was also a Jewish ceremonial hall at the cemetery, no one expressed serious interest in commemorating the city's Holocaust victims. Kroměříž has no plaque devoted only to Jews. Instead, on the World War II memorial, Jews and gentiles are mixed together as victims of Nazism. In Kroměříž in the decades following World War II, only one Holocaust survivor, Hanuš Bermann, wrote articles about the Holocaust and his experiences during it. Other survivors, such as František Färber and Emil Lev, chose not to remember or discuss the past, at least not publicly.¹⁰³

6.4 Property Restitution to the Jewish Community

The post-war activities of the restored Jewish community focused on the restitution of pre-war properties. During the war, houses vacated by the Jews did not remain vacant. The German management of the city assigned the properties to those recognised as suitable and loyal. However, in June 1945, the Commission for the Administration of German and Jewish Houses was established in Kroměříž. On its suggestions, survivors were appointed housekeepers of the houses or the shops of their perished relatives, until their legal claims could be verified. Direct Jewish heirs receive their property back without question. If a non-Jewish person claimed an abandoned Jewish house, the commission assessed the claim, and if there were no heirs, sold the house to the clamant. Jews and their heirs claimed a total of 19 houses in Kroměříž that were handed over. On April 29, 1946, another 30 houses were nationalized and then sold or assigned according to the needs of the city or the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The property of the Jewish religious community went to Kroměříž. After 1989, the Jewish town hall was restored to the Jewish community in Brno. The valuables of Jews hidden by friends and neighbours before transportation were usually not returned. For example, when František Färber returned to Kroměříž after the war, he got back only family photo albums. The few remaining Jews in Kroměříž grew accustomed to seeing their old possessions in their friend's or neighbour's houses.¹⁰⁴

6.5 Kroměříž Today

On the site of the old Jewish cemetery there was, for some period of time, a garden. Now there is a police station with a parking lot. In the Jewish part of the new cemetery, only seven Jewish tombstones remain, some of which were transferred from the old cemetery. On June 17, 1962, a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust from Kroměříž was unveiled. On

¹⁰³ Pálka, „Židé na Kroměřížsku po II. světové válce.“

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the site of the former synagogue, there is currently a road, a sidewalk, and partly the House of Culture, next to which stands a small memorial dedicated to the destroyed Jewish community and the Holocaust victims (pictures 1 and 2 in appendix).¹⁰⁵ In 2017, the Town Hall on Moravcova Street unveiled four so-called stones of “disappeared” that recall the tragic fate of the Jews. In the sidewalk were paved four cobblestones with a brass surface memorializing Joachim Astel, the last rabbi in the city, and his family (picture 3).¹⁰⁶ Apart from the memorial stones, the Jewish community in the city is remembered by the separation wall next to the St. Mary's Church, which used to separate the Jewish quarter from the rest of the city (picture 4).

The former director of the Kroměříž Museum, Tomáš Květák came up with the idea of organising a conference in the autumn of 1994, where scholars from Moravia and Silesia would be given the opportunity to present the results of their findings on the subject of past and present Jewish settlements from various aspects. Since then, the conference has been held annually in Kroměříž under the name “Jews and Moravia” (*Židé a Morava*).¹⁰⁷ Notwithstanding that the Kroměříž Jewish community is now gone, the conference is being held to commemorate the Jews of Moravia. As long as there is only the Prague Jewish community, there is a need to commemorate the Moravian Jewish communities as well, of which nearby Holešov was the largest.

¹⁰⁵ Pálka, “Židé v Kroměříži po druhé světové válce – restituce obecního majetku,” 224.

¹⁰⁶ “Kroměříž odhalila kameny zmizelých, připomínají posledního rabína a jeho rodinu,” Město Kroměříž, accessed April 2018, <http://www.mesto-kromeriz.cz/zpravodaj/tiskove-zpravy/kromeriz-odhalila-kameny-zmizelych-pripominaji-posledniho-rabina-a-jeho-rodinu/>.

¹⁰⁷ Klenovský, *Židovské památky Kroměříže*, 8.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this bachelor thesis was to identify the development of the Jewish community in the Moravian city of Kroměříž and to determine the social and economic motives for the Holocaust. Evidence suggests that Jews in Kroměříž mostly prospered over time, and until the Nazi regime, their lives were more or less peaceful. And in the fifteenth century, the Jewish community was among the largest Jewish communities in Bohemia and Moravia. Their coexistence with the Christian inhabitants of the city had mostly, with a few exceptions, a friendly character, evidenced by the fact that after the revolution, the Jewish quarter merged with the rest of the city into one single entity. With the coming of the Second World War and the Nuremberg Laws, everything changed. Jews in Kroměříž, as well as other Jews within the Protectorate, were deprived of their fundamental human rights and their property was confiscated. An absurd number of regulations and decrees were intended to isolate Jews from the rest of society and classify them as the lowest social class. Jews were banned from entering particular streets, squares, parks, forests, and other public places. German Chancellor Adolf Hitler, with his strong antipathy towards Jews, saw the Jewish problem in apocalyptic terms, and the only logical outcome of his views was the Holocaust. In 1942, three hundred Kroměříž Jews were transported to concentration camps. Of those, approximately twenty returned after the war. Some returned ill and died soon after. Others soon left. A few stayed and tried to put the past behind them. In any case, the Germans had been successful in not only destroying the local Jewish community but in confiscating and dispersing their property. Little remained for those who returned. During the German occupation, in contrast to other nearby Moravian cities, Kroměříž's non-Jewish inhabitants were not vindictive towards the Jews. Some even tried to help them by holding on to their possessions and by sending them letters and care packages. There is no record of any Kroměříž private citizen aiding and abetting the Germans in their implementation of the final solution. Certainly Kroměříž officials did help, but they were under orders to do so, and sometimes those orders were not followed. The Jewish community of Kroměříž did not survive the war. As a result, Kroměříž did profit from the Holocaust, as many Jewish properties are now owned by the city. The city has taken steps of atonement, in the form of memorial stones, the preservation of a portion of the separation wall, and an annually held conference, "Jews and Moravia."

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PICTURES



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Picture 2



Picture 3



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