

The Socioeconomic Motives behind the Holocaust in Valašské Meziříčí

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá socioekonomické motivy masových deportací a následného vyhlazení téměř celé židovské komunity Valašského Meziříčí během druhé světové války. Vysvětluje také okolnosti, které přispěly k poválečné ztrátě historické paměti této komunity, a to i přesto, že byla pro město důležitá nejen historicky, ale i sociálně, ekonomicky a politicky. V závěru této práce je zdokumentováno, jak byla tato vzpomínka na židovskou komunitu ve Valašském Meziříčí po sametové revoluci obnovena.

Klíčová slova: Židé, holokaust, antisemitismus, židovská komunita, nacisté, Valašské Meziříčí, Valašsko, Morava, Česko

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis examines the socioeconomic motives behind the mass deportations and subsequent extermination of almost the entire Jewish community of Valašské Meziříčí, Moravia, during World War II. It also explains the circumstances that contributed to the post-war loss of historical memory of that community, and this despite the fact that the community had been important to the city, not only historically, but socially, economically and politically. Finally, the thesis documents how the memory of the Jewish community in Valašské Meziříčí was somewhat revived after the Velvet Revolution.

Keywords: Jews, Holocaust, anti-Semitism, Jewish community, Nazis, Valašské Meziříčí, Wallachia, Moravia, Czechia

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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

Michael Honey was born in 1929 in Nový Jičín, Moravia, a town with a predominantly ethnic German population. After the Munich Agreement and the subsequent Nazi occupation of the town in autumn 1938, he moved with his family to nearby Valašské Meziříčí, which was, in his memory, “always a Czech town” and therefore “more relaxed” towards Jews.¹ This move, however, proved to be only a temporary reprieve, for just six months later, Valašské Meziříčí too succumbed to Nazi occupation, along with the rest of Moravia. Afterwards, Honey’s fate was intertwined with most other Jews in Nazi-occupied territories. In September 1942, at the age of thirteen, he was deported west to Theresienstadt (Terezín), and then later east to Auschwitz. Somehow, he survived. In fact, he was one of only a few deported from Valašské Meziříčí to do so. The rest of his family perished. Haunted by his wartime experiences and by the loss of his community, Honey did not return to Valašské Meziříčí after the war, instead moving to England.² In fact, none of the surviving Jews returned to Valašské Meziříčí, possibly because they had nothing to which to return. It was not until 1989 that Honey, afforded an opportunity, once again visited the town, which had been his childhood home for four years. When he did, he was dismayed to discover that the historical record of the Jewish community of Valašské Meziříčí had been successfully wiped clean. Propelled to action, Honey first created a list of all the local Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and then was instrumental in the construction of a memorial to them, which was completed in 2004.³ On that list are the names of 174 Jews from Valašské Meziříčí who died as a result of the Nazi “final solution,” including 84 men, 73 women and 17 children.⁴ This Jewish community had clearly played important social, economic and political roles in the town before the war, evinced by the fact that the gentile inhabitants of Valašské Meziříčí were “relative friendly” to their Jewish neighbours during the war, leaving the synagogue and cemetery untouched, and even supporting their participation in anti-Nazi resistance.⁵ Such resistance was ultimately met with deportation and murder, at the hands of the Nazis. With the Jews of Valašské Meziříčí gone, their memory then fell victim to the anti-Semitism

¹ We Remember Jewish Nový Jičín & Jewish Valašské Meziříčí! (Czechoslovakia), “Michael Honey: Commemoration of Valašské Meziříčí,” accessed April 5, 2020, <http://www.zchor.org/valasske.htm#commemoration>.

² Michael Honey, “If I Forget Thee...,” accessed April 28, 2020, <http://www.zchor.org/honey.htm>.

³ We Remember Jewish Nový Jičín & Jewish Valašské Meziříčí! (Czechoslovakia), “Michael Honey: Commemoration of Valašské Meziříčí.”

⁴ Jan Smutek, *Odboj Valašska a nacistická persekuce bývalého okresu Val. Meziříčí 1939-1945* (Valašské Meziříčí: Valašské Meziříčí, 1968), 235.

⁵ Tomáš Baletka and Zdeněk Pomkla, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí* (Valašské Meziříčí: Valašské Meziříčí, 2017), 111-145.

of the communist regime.⁶ The local synagogue was torn down, and the cemetery was ploughed over. Only after the Velvet Revolution was the memory revived, largely thanks to Honey himself. This memory seems to reflect kindly on the residents of Valašské Meziříčí, who clearly had economic motives for participating in the Holocaust but chose not to act on them.

⁶ Tomáš Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě* (Praha: Sefer, 2001), 352-355; Ladislav Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí* (Valašské Meziříčí: Valašské Meziříčí, 2004), 92-96.

1 BACKGROUND ON THE JEWS IN THE CZECH LANDS

The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC and the subsequent expulsion of Jews into Babylon began the Jewish diaspora. However, the Jews retained their cultural, religious and national character and merely adapted to the environment in which they settled.⁷ Judaism is not only a religion but a way of life that encompasses the entire cultural, social, legal and religious tradition of the Israelites.⁸

1.1 The Beginning of the Jewish Settlement in Bohemia and Moravia

According to accessible documents, the first Jews settled in the Czech lands, a trade roads crossing, in the early tenth century. Jewish merchant and diplomat Ibrahim Ibn Yaqub recorded meeting Jewish inhabitants and Jewish traders in Prague in AD 965.⁹ Although the Czech lands were sparsely populated in this time,¹⁰ Prague was an urban centre thanks to its strategic location on the Vltava River in the heart of Europe.¹¹ Jews inhabiting the city contributed to the development of foreign trade and the minting of coins.

1.1.1 Development of Financing

Medieval society specified the money trade as a source of livelihood for Jews. For Christians, the lending of money was officially banned because money was considered unclean. Other types of trade were allowed only inside the Jewish ghetto, where they could be no competition with Christians. By the thirteenth century, the Jewish community was distinct and marginalized.¹² Even so, their services as money lenders and traders were valuable to the monarchs. Granted *Servi camerae regiae* (servants of the royal chamber) status, they were afforded status and protection.¹³ Although Christians referred to Jews as murderers of Christ, whenever money was needed, Christians turned to them. However, when money was not needed, Christians discriminated against them and sometimes even expelled them from the land.¹⁴

⁷ Hayim H. Ben-Sasson *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 160.

⁸ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 155, 160.

⁹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 11; Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 8.

¹⁰ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 12.

¹¹ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 8.

¹² Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 21.

¹³ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 8.

¹⁴ Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust, The Jewish Tragedy* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1986), 19.

1.1.2 The First Legislation for Foreigners in the Czech lands

In the Czech lands, the first legislation for foreigners was issued by Vratislav II at the end of the eleventh century. Up to the thirteenth century, Jews were foreigners freely trading their products. They could apparently own land, live anywhere and carry on trade without any restrictions. Later, Jews of Bohemia and Moravia fell under the direct jurisdiction of the king, so they had formally guaranteed protection at the cost of high taxes. Thus, they represented a significant income for the ruler. Nevertheless, the protection was not always effective, because the relationship between the Jews and the Christians was hostile, and because the inhabitants of Bohemia disliked strangers. Moreover, one king during this time, Břetislav II, confiscated Jewish property.¹⁵

Since the eleventh century, Jews were periodically accused of ritual murders by lower-class Christians, who falsely believed that Jews were sacrificing Christian children. Such accusations were often followed by pogroms, which claimed thousands of victims. Despite a rejection by eminent Christian theologians, these superstitions continued to spread, and the majority of Christians believed them.¹⁶

1.1.3 Jews since the Age of the Crusades

In Bohemia, there were relatively good conditions for Jews before the First Crusade in 1096, when “many Jews were massacred, their property looted, others were forced to convert.”¹⁷ This crusade is considered the first pogrom in the Czech lands. The crusaders were mainly massacring Jewish inhabitants under the pretext of the death of Jesus. Against such attacks, Czech Jews were largely unprotected. Henry IV clearly cared more about Jewish property than Jewish lives. For this reason, Many Czech Jews immigrated to Poland or Hungary.¹⁸

After a meeting of the Lateran Church Council in 1215, during which Pope Innocence III confirmed the complete segregation of the Jewish population in Christian lands, the situation of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia deteriorated rapidly. Jews were forced to wear a special sign, a designation which would occur twice more, in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁹

Since the contact of Jews and Christians was banned, Christians were strictly forbidden from living with them, hosting them or being hosted by them. Christian sexual intercourse

¹⁵ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 13-15, 285.

¹⁶ Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 481-482.

¹⁷ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 8.

¹⁸ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 16-20.

¹⁹ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (Phoenix Giant, 2001), 210-211.

with Jews was subject to capital punishment. Because of these restrictions, Jews were forced to live mainly in closed Jewish communities, later called ghettos. For most of medieval history, Jews were not allowed to employ Christians, own land, or engage in farming. These means of segregation remained valid until the eighteenth century.²⁰

To make money, Jews engaged in money lending. During the Hussite Wars in the fifteenth century, they charged interest as high as 44 percent. Such usury was later outlawed by Vladislav II, who capped interest rates at 25 percent.²¹ Although such high interest rates did not last, and although Czech Jews were allowed to branch out, into small shops and crafts, the prejudice against Jews as usurers persisted.²²

1.1.4 *Statuta Judaeorum* as the First Legislation for Jews

Jews were often subjected to violence by Christians. This led to emergence of a series of Papal bulls. The most important of these, issued in the mid-thirteenth century by Pope Innocence IV, stated that Jews should not be forced into baptism, Christians should not deprive them of their property, physically attack them or desecrating their burial grounds.²³

In the same century, *Statuta Judaeorum* was published by King Otakar II, which became the basis of Jewish legislation in Bohemia and Moravia until the end of the eighteenth century. *Statuta Judaeorum* declared in 32 short paragraphs basic laws that regulated the relation between Jews and monarchs and determined the principles for autonomous administrative and judicial practice within Jewish communities.²⁴ These privileges were valid until the end of the reign of the ruler who declared them. The new rulers had to be asked for their renewal, and Jews had to pay properly for it.

Czech monarch Charles IV was reportedly more “fair” to Jews in comparison with other Czech rulers. On the other hand, he was the first Czech king who explicitly called them *Servi camerae* and paid his debts at their expense. Reportedly, there were at least 20 cases when loans made by Jews to Charles IV were not repaid.²⁵

²⁰ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 16-21, 113; Rothkirchen, *The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia*, 2-3.

²¹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 292-296.

²² Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 471.

²³ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 22.

²⁴ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 23.

²⁵ Rothkirchen, *The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia*, 10-11.

1.2 The Fifteenth Century and the Hussites

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, all Jewish bills of debt older than 10 years were cancelled in Moravia. Apparently, the issue was that the Jews demanded their rights against all indebted Christians, including nobles. Like the Catholics, the Hussites also despised the Jews and engaged in pogroms against them. Also, Silesian Jews experienced mass murders and confiscation of properties, and those Jewish children under age seven were sent to live with Christian families for re-education.²⁶

1.3 The Reign of the Habsburgs

During the reign of Vladislav Jagiellon in the early sixteenth century, the municipal offices and nobles tried to induce the Jews to pay various bills that they were not obliged to pay. Moreover, high society demanded the Jewish expulsion from the Czech lands. The king did not meet this demand, however, because doing so would hurt him financially. In the mid-sixteenth century, the Jews were newly accused of spying for the Turks.²⁷ Moravian Jews did not suffer as much as their Bohemian brethren at this time, leading many Bohemian Jews to take refuge in Moravia. Jews were important for the Moravian economy, so the nobility protected them.²⁸ The situation for Moravian Jews improved even further when Rudolph II took to the throne in the 1570s. Not only did he not expel the Jews from the Czech lands, but he legalized their trade in most goods. By the end of the sixteenth century, Jews had the backing of the courts and part of the aristocracy.²⁹

During the reign of Ferdinand II in 1627, Jews were recipients of increased privileges, including the right to settle anywhere throughout the kingdom. Such privileges stemmed from the Habsburg reliance on Jewish finances to fund the Thirty Years' War. Even so, Jews still suffered during the war, especially in Moravia, where Swedish soldiers sometimes attacked them. For instance, in Kroměříž in 1643, Swedish soldiers murdered most of the inhabitants of the ghetto. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 ended the war, the Emperor granted the Czech Jews amnesty. Despite this, Christians increasingly viewed Jews as a nuisance.³⁰

²⁶ Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 565-580; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 31-47.

²⁷ Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, 222; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 51-63.

²⁸ Miroslav Marada, "Židovské obce na Moravě," in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v říjnu 1994 v Kroměříži* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 1995), 8; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 68.

²⁹ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 9.

³⁰ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 10.

1.3.1 Official Anti-Semitism

In the seventeenth century, the fight of Christians against Bohemian, Moravian and especially Prague Jews continued with the support of the court, and many times at its initiative, with such intensity that historians are not afraid to speak about official anti-Semitism.³¹ Radical proposals to reduce or expel the Jewish population were halted, however, by an outbreak of plague, which was later blamed on the Jews themselves. In Prague, every second to third Jew died of the plague.³²

In Bohemia and Moravia during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Jews should pay taxes for almost everything. They paid taxes of interests, alcohol, a per capita tax and a tax for military purposes. Besides these taxes they should pay also those that were intended for Christians.³³

Also during the reign of Charles VI, Jews were subject to anti-Semitic laws. According to the *Familiant Laws* approved in 1726, only fathers of Jewish families had the right to reside in the country and acquire *inkolate* (nationality).³⁴ After the death of a father, *inkolate* only belonged to the eldest son, who was the only one allowed to marry. Families with only daughters were considered extinct, and the daughters had to mostly marry abroad. The number of Jews was also regulated by *Numerus Clausus* of 1726, which allowed only 5,106 Jewish families to live in Moravia, and 8,541 in Bohemia.³⁵

1.3.2 The Reign of Maria Theresa

Empress Maria Theresa wanted to exile the Jews forever from her dominion, on the dubious grounds of alleged Jewish cooperation with the Prussians, with whom Austria Hungary had been at war. In reality, the empress was a staunch Catholic who hated Jews. By royal decree, all Jews had to leave the empire by the end of June 1744.³⁶ This expulsion, however, soon damaged not only merchants, but the economy as a whole. As a result, the empress allowed Jews to return, and about 1,000 Czech Jewish families did so.³⁷

³¹ Marada, "Židovské obce na Moravě," 9-10.

³² Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 73-96.

³³ Pavel Kocman, "Daňové zatížení moravských Židů v 16. a 17. Století" (paper presented at the annual meeting Židé a Morava, Kroměříž, November 5, 2008).

³⁴ Jana Vobecká, *Demographic Avant-garde: Jews in Bohemia between the Enlightenment and Shoah* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), 22.

³⁵ Mark Avrum Ehrlich, *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 969.

³⁶ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 11.

³⁷ Vobecká, *Demographic Avant-garde*, 23.

1.3.3 The Reign of Joseph II

After the implementation of the *General Judicial Code* of 1784, Jews were placed on equal jurisdiction as Christians. The aim of the reforms was to build a centralized state with a modern industrial and economic base. To attempt the Jews could gain a relationship with the state and society, the ruler tried to remove the most significant differences in the status of Jews and Christians. However, *Tolerance tax* and *Familiant Laws* remained valid throughout the reign of Joseph II. On the other hand, in 1782 he abolished the law for Jews to live in ghettos. In 1787, Emperor Joseph II also implemented the *Edict of Toleration*, thus abolishing the obligation for Jews to wear a special label differentiating them from others. It also allowed them to attend university, to engage in most trades, to go to pubs, and to live with Christians under one roof.³⁸

One of the most important reforms of the eighteenth century was the reform in 1784, which made German the official language of the empire, thus unifying state administration. Consequently, all Jews had to take German names. In 1797, the Systematic Jewish Patent summarized measures concerning Jews in the Czech lands, encouraging Jews to assimilate.³⁹ Jewish schools accelerated this process by helping Jewish children to adapt to German culture. This, however, had the unintended consequence of putting Jews in the middle of a struggle between factions arguing over Czech or German nationalism. In this struggle, Jews tended to embrace German nationalism, a fact which would have later repercussions.⁴⁰

1.4 The Situation for Jews in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond

Thanks to the authorities, supported by the Enlightenment, the traditional way of Jewish teaching almost disappeared by the middle of the nineteenth century. When the Haskalah⁴¹ spread throughout the Czech lands, the Jews tended to assimilation and integration into society at large.⁴² In 1833, 54 prominent Jews in the Czech lands applied for citizenship, but the court ignored their applications. Then, in July 1841, the Emperor issued further reforms. The *Familiant Laws* and expulsion orders were gradually revoked, and Jews were allowed to live freely in Prague. However, the *Systemic Patent* remained largely in force, and Jews were still deprived of full citizenship. In 1848, a revolution in Europe began, which the Jews

³⁸ Ehrlich, *Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Diaspora*, 969.

³⁹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 108-115.

⁴⁰ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 11.

⁴¹ The Jewish Enlightenment movement.

⁴² Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 11.

welcomed, as it enabled them to participate in political events as citizens, journalists and politicians, and to become members of academic and civil fellowships.⁴³

Overall, the years 1848 and 1849 brought fundamental changes in the legal position of Jews in the Czech lands. They gained freedom of movement and settlement, and open access to public offices. The *Tolerance Tax*, ghettos and *numerus clausus* for rural Jews were abolished. Jews believed it would only be a matter of time before they formally gained full equality. This occurred in 1867, when they were given religious or personal freedom, and freedom of assembly, profession and expression. Jews were also granted citizenship and the right to vote. Thus, they enjoyed the same rights as the rest of the populace for the first time in history.⁴⁴

1.4.1 Political Situation in Prague

However, the situation in Prague remained unfavourable. Most merchants and craftsmen fought against any loosening of the segregation of Jews, and in the spring of 1848 the city was heavily flooded by anti-Semitic leaflets. For fear of pogrom, the Jews turned to the National Committee for protection, with limited success.⁴⁵

1.4.2 Emancipation of Czech Jews

Especially in 1848, the situation was difficult for Jews. State authorities that could protect Jews lost influence. Because of this, many families left the Czech lands, some for political reasons. Of those who chose to stay, some were imprisoned. In the late 1860s, a second wave of emigration started, as rural Jews moved to urban centres for commercial reasons. This led to a rising Jewish urban middle class that gained clout in the national economy.⁴⁶

The so-called emancipation of Jews in the Czech lands weakened traditional, cultural and social ties within the Jewish community and triggered a crisis in its institutions. Since the 1860s, Jews faced regular attacks from Czechs because of their inclination to German culture.⁴⁷ Despite rising anti-Semitism, Jews believed that everything would be resolved over time.⁴⁸

⁴³ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 10-11; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 117-121.

⁴⁴ Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 790-794; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 124-125.

⁴⁵ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 123.

⁴⁶ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 124-126.

⁴⁷ Miloš Pojar, *T. G. Masaryk a židovství*. (Praha: Academia, 2016), 129.

⁴⁸ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 127-129.

1.4.3 Assimilation vs. Zionism

1.4.3.1 Assimilation

The process of becoming part of a society and not only a separate group was first outlined by Leopold Kompert, who was grateful to Joseph II for showing Jews the way to social integration. He believed that the seemingly insoluble problems would be resolved by the fusion of Christianity and Judaism. Even though he was not a supporter of Czech-Jewish assimilation, he gave many impulses to its creation.

In the last third of the nineteenth century, as a product of Romanticism, occurred the resurrection of the Czech nation and the revival of the Czech language. The Czechs had their own education and politics, and were competitive in business and industry. This was the prerequisite for the emergence of Czech-Jewish assimilation. In 1893, associations from towns and villages merged into the cultural community of the Czech-Jewish National Union. Now it was no longer just a national rapprochement, but also a social and political one. Czech-Jewish assimilants took the Czechs' side in their political, educational and economic rivalry with the Germans.⁴⁹ In contrast, rural Jews still remained devoted to Judaism instead of assimilation.⁵⁰

Despite urban Jews standing with Czechs, the press continued to attack Jews as bearers of German. Matters then took a downturn in 1899, when a dim-witted 23-year-old Jew, Leopold Hilsner, was accused of the ritual murder (blood libel) of a young Catholic Czech woman. Then, the whole nation, with a few exceptions, became anti-Semitic. This, combined with other factors (pogroms in Russia, the Dreyfus Affair), raised doubts about the possibility of assimilation as a solution to the Jewish problem and was one of the impetuses for modern Zionism – a movement based on the idea of an independent Jewish state.⁵¹

1.4.3.2 Hilsner Affair

The Hilsner Affair came at a time when anti-Semitism in Europe was at a peak, and pogroms were mainly instigated by governments, which were busy strengthening anti-Jewish legislation.⁵² During Hilsner's trial, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, then a professor at Charles University in Prague, advocated on his behalf, on the grounds that Hilsner was a victim of

⁴⁹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 486-509.

⁵⁰ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 12.

⁵¹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 509.

⁵² Miloš Pojar, *Hilsnerova aféra a česká společnost, 1899-1999: Sborník přednášek z konference na Univerzitě Karlově v Praze ve dnech 24.-26. listopadu 1999* (Praha: Židovské muzeum v Praze, 1999), 95-148.

superstition..⁵³ Even so, Hilsner was found guilty of ritual murder and sentenced to death by hanging. A Viennese court set aside the judgement, but in 1900 the Court of Appeals upheld the death sentence. Emperor Franz Joseph changed the sentence to life imprisonment, but Hilsner was released from prison in 1918 by Franz Joseph's successor, Charles I. This affair destroyed not only Hilsner's life, but also brought a period of pogroms and uncertainty and made the wave of assimilation efforts more difficult.⁵⁴

1.4.3.3 Zionism

Zionism as a political and cultural movement found adherents and enthusiastic promoters mostly among Eastern European Jews from the socially weaker classes, students and liberal intellectuals. The Czech nation itself was still awakening, and its culture was still being sought, so the Jews were more inclined towards Germany,⁵⁵ but as early as the 1840s, some Jews claimed Czechness. At the end of the nineteenth century, small Zionist groups and associations were established in the Czech lands, founded by German-Jewish university students and high school students from assimilated Jewish families. The first association was founded in 1894 in Brno, and a goal of these associations was to return to Judaism and to *Erec Jisrael* (the country of Israel).⁵⁶ The peace treaties following World War I led to political achievement by the Zionist Movement.⁵⁷ Czechoslovakia was formed in 1918 by these treaties, and its first president, Masaryk, supported Zionism and Jewish nationality. Thus, Czechoslovakia became one of the centres of European Zionism. Thanks to this, and to the initiative of Zionists, the Czechoslovak Constitution of 1920 incorporated the protection of the rights of minorities, including Jews. Czechoslovakia then became the first European country to recognize Jews as a nation, this despite the fact that the Czechoslovak Constitution had intentionally not defined the concept of a national group.

While in Moravian and Czech towns and villages, Jews were more inclined to Czech culture, on the border with Germany they were more German. Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, warned Czech Jews several times not to choose. As a result, many Jews

⁵³ Livia Rothkirchen, "Czech Attitudes towards the Jews during the Nazi Regime," in *Yad Vashem Studies XIII*, ed. Livia Rothkirchen, 287-320 (Jerusalem: Al-pha Press, 1979), 292-293.

⁵⁴ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 259-262.

⁵⁵ Miloš Pojar, *T. G. Masaryk a židovství*, 129.

⁵⁶ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 241, 489, 522.

⁵⁷ Yoav Gelber, "Zionist Policy and the Fate of European Jewry," in *Yad Vashem Studies XIII*, ed. Livia Rothkirchen, 169-210 (Jerusalem: Al-pha Press, 1979), 169.

responded by claiming to be Jewish, not Czech or German, but German prevailed as their main language.⁵⁸

1.5 First Republic

When the Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918, the Jewish community expanded to include Jews in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. Disagreements over national, religious and language preferences divided this community. The vision of the Czechoslovak state, based on democratic principles and guaranteeing the Jews equal rights, mobilized Jews to participate actively in politics. After having survived an unstable period of discrimination and hatred as well as the near cultural break-up of their own community, Jews believed in a better future, one over which they could assert some control.⁵⁹ In 1919, the Jewish Party of Czechoslovakia and the Union of Czech Jews in the Czechoslovak Republic were established. It was these political groups who successfully lobbied the Masaryk administration for the protection of minority rights, which was incorporated into the 1920 constitution.⁶⁰

1.5.1 Nazi Policy

In the 1920s, an economic crisis engulfed Germany, stemming largely from debts incurred from World War I. However, according to the National Socialist German Workers' Party, a.k.a. the Nazis, it was the fault of the Jews. Nazis described Jews as dirty usurers but on the other hand as deceitful masters of the economy. They were considered as demons and archfiends, true enemies of the ethnic German.⁶¹

In 1933, the systematic persecution of the Jewish inhabitants of Germany began. Many Jews started to emigrate. At the same time, the 13th World Zionist Congress was held in Prague, and Czechoslovakia became one of the centres of anti-Nazi emigration. Between 1933 and 1938, over 10,000 German-speaking Jews moved to Czechoslovakia, and the Palestinian Authority opened in Prague. In the Reich Chancellery on November 5, 1937, Hitler announced his socioeconomic strategy, the aim of which was to enlarge the German

⁵⁸ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 517-525; Pojar, *T. G. Masaryk a židovství*, 129.

⁵⁹ Petra Dřevojková, "Forgotten?: The Jews of Vsetín and the Historical Memory of the Holocaust," Bachelor's thesis, Tomáš Baťa University Zlín, 2012, 27.

⁶⁰ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 134-140.

⁶¹ Laurence Rees, *Osvětim: nacisté a "konečné řešení"* (Praha: Euromedia Group, 2018), 12; Uriel Tal, "On the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide," in *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance* 13, ed. Livia Rothkirchen, 7-52 (Jerusalem: Alpha Press, 1979), 40-43.

nation, to give Germans needed space.⁶² The first step was the Anschluss, in March 1938. Then came the Munich Agreement of September 1938, which deprived Czechoslovakia of the Sudetenland. Two months later, the Nazis orchestrated Kristallnacht, a pogrom, the aim of which was to expel the Jews from Germany and deprive them of their property.⁶³

1.6 Situation before the Holocaust

In October 1938, the English government published a white paper, which limited the number of immigrants to Palestine to a maximum of 75,000 over the next 5 years. This happened when thousands of Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia needed Palestine more than ever before. The Israeli Prime Minister at the time declared that the white paper policy would lead to Jews and Czechoslovakia being surrendered to Hitler. He also anticipated an increase in anti-Semitism in democratic countries, which was later fulfilled. At this time, Zionists and assimilators were able to cooperate in only one area: helping refugees from Nazism.⁶⁴ In 1935, racial laws were proclaimed in Nuremberg, through which millions of Jews were persecuted and deprived of their property.⁶⁵

1.6.1 The Holocaust

Holocaust is a term that describes “the mass extermination of Jews in Europe under the Nazi regime.”⁶⁶ It is understood as an act, an intention or a plan that includes “murder, extermination, deportation, illegal imprisonment, and torture, persecution on political, racial and religious grounds.” It is not only a question of Jewish race but of all minorities, including gypsies, homosexuals, and others.⁶⁷

On March 15, 1939, there were about 135,000 residents of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, classified by law as Jews or half-breeds. These people were overwhelmed by discriminatory measures that prohibited, for example, employment, attendance at schools, moving, going to restaurants, parks, streets, cultural facilities, etc. The property of the Jews subsequently deported to concentration camps then mostly fell to the Germans, who sold it. Only a few Jewish businessmen, financiers, and others recognized the threat of Nazi Germany in time and sold their property in advance. Some of them even left the country,

⁶² Tal, “On the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide,” 30.

⁶³ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 135-139; Rees, *Osvětim: Nacisté a "konečné řešení"*, 14.

⁶⁴ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 532-533.

⁶⁵ Zdeněk Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže* (Valašské Meziříčí: Zdeněk Kment, 2017), 72.

⁶⁶ Tal, “On the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide”, 7.

⁶⁷ Tal, “On the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide”, 7-13; Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, D.C.: The Lawbook Exchange, 1944), 79-95.

thereby saving their lives. The rest were gradually deprived of civil rights, property, and then life. Holocaust survivors hardly regained their property, and when they succeeded, they lost it again in 1948.⁶⁸

Since September 1941, Jews had to wear special markings in the Protectorate, emigration was banned, and the Theresienstadt Ghetto was established. In November, the systematic deportations of Jews from the Protectorate began; they could only take personal items up to 50 kg. In January 1942, the first transport from Theresienstadt to the extermination camps was dispatched. By 1945, more than 130 transports had been dispatched from the Protectorate (80,000 Jews, the vast majority of whom were killed). Then a conference in Wansee was held, thanks to which the mass murder of Jews in concentration camps began. In 1944, the Nazis perpetrated mass murder.⁶⁹

In 1945, Theresienstadt was liberated.⁷⁰ Around 40,000 Jews from the Czech lands survived the Holocaust, while 272,000 did not. Jews who returned to the Czech lands after the war faced a problem with restitution. In the first post-war emigration wave of 1945-50, 25,000 Jews moved from the Czech lands. According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 5,820,000 Jews were murdered during World War II. Thanks to persecution and pogroms, Jewish deaths would continue, mainly in communist countries, after the war.⁷¹

1.7 Judaic Life after WWII

After the German defeat, life of the Jewish inhabitants slowly returned to a new normal, because the real life of Jews after the Shoah was never the same. Jewish communities, with the help of foreign Jewish organizations, looked after the needs of the Jews.⁷² In 1945, 15,000 Jews lived in Bohemia and Moravia, of which 10,000 were members of religious communities. However, many of them soon emigrated. In 1946, President Edvard Beneš expressed support for the Zionists and allowed Jews to move to Palestine. For those who remained, he preached full assimilation. The demographic picture of Czechoslovakia had also changed. The Germans were expelled by the Beneš Decrees, and the Jews remained

⁶⁸ Miroslav Kárný, "Konečné řešení:" *Genocida českých židů v německé protektorátní politice* (Praha: Academia, 1991), 39-47; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 318-345; Rees, *Osvětim*, 77-78.

⁶⁹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 141-142; Rees, *Osvětim*, 92-95.

⁷⁰ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 341-345.

⁷¹ Judith Sandeen Bartel, *Holocaust: Ztracená slova* (Pardubice: Mayday, 2006), 4; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 243.

⁷² Rees, *Osvětim*, 288-289.

only a fraction of the original number. Jewish survivors faced continued discrimination, as “the other.”⁷³

1.7.1 The Communist Regime

In the period from 1948 to 1953, Czech Jews faced official anti-Semitism that echoed the anti-Semitism in the Stalinist Soviet Union. After Stalin died, this anti-Semitism slowly faded, as the Communist party officially touted racial and ethnic equality. Even so, Jews faced continued religious persecution.⁷⁴

1.7.1.1 Official Anti-Semitism

Czechoslovak assistance to Jews was crucial and decisive in the post-war era. The humanistic traditions of Czechoslovakia drew on the legacy of President Masaryk and his son, Jan. But when Stalin discovered that Israel would be a democratic state, the relationship between the Soviet Union and Israel grew hostile and cold, and Jews were once again considered an unreliable component of the population.⁷⁵ Anti-Semitic trials were held in the early 1950s, and many Zionists were put to death or sentenced to long-term punishments. Even after the “show trials” subsided, a near constant undercurrent of official anti-Semitism remained for the rest of the communist era.⁷⁶

1.7.2 Jewish Life after 1989

After 1989, the life of the Jewish religious community began to return to normal. In 1990, relations with Israel were re-established, and more Czech Jews emigrated there. Czechoslovak President Václav Havel even visited Jerusalem. In 1991, the Federation of Jewish Communities brought together 10 Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Republic. In 1994, Parliament decided to pay a lump sum to some victims of Nazi crimes. Three years later, the Czech-German Future Fund was set up to coordinate compensation for Holocaust victims. A year later, the fund paid a regular amount to the prisoners of the Nazi concentration camps. In 2000, the Czech parliament passed a law mitigating certain property injustices experienced by the victims of the Holocaust, and the state invested CZK 300 million into the foundation fund. Currently, there are approximately 2,700 Jews living in

⁷³ Bartel, *Holocaust*, 34-39; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 348-49, 577-78.

⁷⁴ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 579.

⁷⁵ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 320.

⁷⁶ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 320; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 352-355.

Bohemia and Moravia, the lowest number in centuries.⁷⁷ Even so, Anti-Semitism is again on the rise in the Czech lands.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 151, 357, 658.

⁷⁸ Associated Press, "New Report Finds Anti-Semitism on the Rise in Czech Republic," July 3, 2019, <https://apnews.com/f014a32bc4444fb091e03c14d6341a5f>.

2 HISTORY OF JEWS IN VALAŠSKÉ MEZIŘÍČÍ, FROM FIRST MENTION TO WORLD WAR I

Valašské Meziříčí is situated in the eastern part of Moravia, in the Wallachian region.⁷⁹ The town acquired its name due to its location at the confluence of the rivers Vsetín and Rožnov Bečva.⁸⁰ The exact year of its establishment is not known; publications mention the years 1275, 1286 or 1287.⁸¹ Overall, its origin is attributed to the great colonization at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. People settled in this location because, in the thirteenth century, there was a significant road from Silesia to today's Austria. At that time, the territory belonged to the Bishopric of Olomouc, but since the sixteenth century, the whole territory of Wallachia was owned by nobility. Namely, Jan of Pernštejn owned the feudal homesteads. It was during his reign that one of the most important monuments of the city was constructed – Žerotín Chateau.⁸²

In Moravia, the first settlement by Jews came mainly after the Thirty Years' War. At that time, there was the greatest increase of the Jewish community, prompting measures against its further expansion. Although in Moravia there was tolerance towards non-Catholics that did not stop the Catholic Church from attempting to catholicize the whole region.⁸³

In 1924, the nearby village of Krásno nad Bečvou became part of Valašské Meziříčí.⁸⁴ Prior, both in Valašské Meziříčí and in Krásno nad Bečvou, Jews were subject to the *Familians' Law* from 1727.⁸⁵ This measure, with the *Inkolate*, was in force until 1848, so many Jews married secretly. Due to uncertainty, the Jewish population isolated itself from society and formed its own communities. Emperor Charles VI spurred this isolation by ordering the complete separation of Jews from the Christian population. He also prohibited Jews from

⁷⁹ "Meziříčí" means between rivers.

⁸⁰ Ladislav Baletka, Tomáš Baletka, Eva Čermáková and Zdeněk Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí: Dějiny Českých, Moravských a Slezských měst* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2017), 11.

⁸¹ Ladislav Baletka and Jiří Demel, *600 let města Valašského Meziříčí: Valašské Meziříčí od minulosti k dnešku*, supplement of the annual journal *Valašské Meziříčí*, 1970.

⁸² Ladislav Baletka, *Okres Vsetín: Rožnovsko, Valašskomeziříčsko, Vsetínsko* (Valašské Meziříčí, 2002), 855-856.

⁸³ Josef Machýček, "Economic and Social Life in Valašské Meziříčí in Years 1939-1945," bachelor's thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2014, 12, <https://docplayer.cz/17723212-Univerzita-karlova-v-praze-filozoficka-fakulta-ustav-ceskych-dejin-bakalarska-prace-jaroslav-machycek.html>.

⁸⁴ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 14-24.

⁸⁵ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 10-12.

residing near churches and chapels. In connection with these regulations, the first plan of Valašské Meziříčí was created, with Jewish houses forming the edge of the municipality.⁸⁶

Not until the *Edict of Tolerance* was issued by Emperor Joseph II in 1781-1782,⁸⁷ did the position of local Jews slightly improve, and after 1860 the number of Jews in Wallachia began to increase. Although a Hebrew-inscribed tombstone from the fifteenth century is the earliest testimony of the first Jewish settlement in Meziříčí, the first written account of Jews in the town dates back to the early sixteenth century. This report, written in 1523 by Jan of Žerotín, says that the people of Meziříčí accepted the Jew Solomon from Strážnice. Other reports come from the mid-sixteenth century, when both municipalities belonged to Jan of Pernštejn. At that time, Jews came to the city for trading, but not trading in land, which was forbidden for them.⁸⁸

Except for the period 1431-1433, when the fanatic monk Jan Kapistran worked in Moravia and expelled Jews from their settlements, mass murdered them, and confiscated their property, Jews in Meziříčí were not treated much different from Christians. In fact, they might have been privileged. In Krásno nad Bečvou, there is a report from 1560 about the Jew Abraham, a creditor, who was reportedly in the service of the nobility and lived under its protection, and allegedly rented a local distillery. At that time, the production of liquor was one of the most common sources of Jewish livelihood in Wallachia. If Jews were privileged, however, it was over by 1610, when Jetrich from Žerotín took over the administration of the city and banned Jews from selling fur products.⁸⁹

2.1.1 A Story from Ondřej Sivý's Chronicle

The production of liquor was not only a form of livelihood for Jews, but also played a role in history when subjects wanted to conquer Valašské Meziříčí in 1621. As soon as the rebellion began, the imperial army arrived. The rebels reacted in time and managed to go to Štěpánov, where they planned their next move. At that moment, a Jew passed by, carrying two buckets of liquor. The subjects stole his liquor and drank it. According to the story, they became so drunk that the imperial army conquered them immediately, and the town, thanks to a Jew with liquor, resisted the subjects and remained unconquered.⁹⁰ From this record in

⁸⁶ Ladislav Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí* (Valašské Meziříčí: Městský úřad Valašské Meziříčí, 2004), 6.

⁸⁷ Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 756.

⁸⁸ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 7-8.

⁸⁹ L. Baletka, T. Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 118.

⁹⁰ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 8.

Ondřej Sivý's chronicle, one of the oldest chronicles of the town, it can be concluded that in 1621, Jews already lived in Meziříčí or Krásno, and there was a distillery in one of these towns.

2.2 First Jewish Roots after the Thirty Years' War

The first surviving documentation that involves the acquisition of property by a Jew is a contract from the mid-seventeenth century, in which a tenant of the Meziříčí distillery, Isaac, bought a house from Mathew Strážnovský on today's Mostní street. Subsequently, the house was rewritten to his son Šajer and then to the next five generations of descendants until 1801. However, the conditions of their stay in the town are not known. Nevertheless, a similar contract preserved from Vsetín suggests that a Jew could live here with his family and servants, and deceased members were buried in a Jewish cemetery in one of the surrounding towns.⁹¹

This contract dates back to 1650, two years after the end of the Thirty Years' War, when the Swedes turned Valašské Meziříčí to ashes. The town was almost depopulated, and only a fraction of the original population returned back; thus, many houses were abandoned. Isaac was freed from all taxes, and his liquor distillery earned him huge profits. This led to the dissatisfaction of other citizens of the city, which rose to the surface in a dispute with the manor owner Bernard Ferdinand from Žerotín. The dispute between the town council and the nobility broke out in 1660, but the town council did not dare to confront Bernard, so they sent their complaint to the Olomouc bishopric, and the matter was investigated by the bishop himself. According to the townspeople, the mere purchase of real estate by a Jew was already contrary to the imperial regulations. However, the owner of the manor refused these speculations and defended the Jew. The owner also pointed out that none of the Christians were interested in the house and, on the contrary, the population had moved from Meziříčí. Also, the town council allegedly did not care about the occupying of abandoned houses, and thus the owner of the manor lost his rental income.⁹² It can therefore be concluded that Isaac was allied with the nobility.

Although the nobility supported Jews, mainly for financial reasons, the burghers of Meziříčí could not stand them. This was mainly due to the church, which was hostile to

⁹¹ Ladislav Baletka, "Holocaust. K historii židovské komunity na území našeho okresu a k jejímu zániku," *Nové Valašsko*, November 4, 1992; Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 9.

⁹² Ladislav Baletka, "Holocaust. K historii židovské komunity na území našeho okresu a k jejímu zániku," *Nové Valašsko*, November 4, 1992; Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 9.

anyone who professed another religion. After Bernard's death in 1692, the position of Jews in the town deteriorated considerably. The feud fell to the Bishop of Olomouc, and he immediately made radical changes. He thought that these changes would cause the Jews to leave the town. Descendants of Daniel Isaac Hirsch sought to confirm the rights to the house on Mostní Street, but they had to pay for it.⁹³ Isaac's second son, Solomon, then moved to Vsetín, and because he was a younger brother, according to the *Familiants' Law*, he could not get married. For this reason, he subsequently immigrated to Hungary.

Jews of Valašské Meziříčí also pursued other business activities besides liquor production. They also traded in wool, which was imported from Slovakia, where the Jews of Meziříčí had good contacts, because the *Familiant's Law* did not apply there. According to the record books of Meziříčí, before 1800, buying wool on credit or borrowing money from Jews was rare. However, the first surviving document about a debt to a Jew is from the town's book from 1791. Later, we can see a much higher increase in Jewish creditors, and most of the debts were due to the wool trade.⁹⁴

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the actions of Jewish merchants in the municipality of Meziříčí began to accumulate. However, there was never a seizure of immovable property on behalf of a Jewish lender, because the ban on the sale of property to Jews was respected. Clearly, however, there were exceptions made on property ownership. In 1834, of the 2088 homes in Meziříčí, 22 of them were registered to Jews. How they got around the law is anyone's guess.

The breakthrough in the development of the municipalities Krásno nad Bečvou and Valašské Meziříčí began in the second half of the nineteenth century, after the revolution of 1848.⁹⁵ While Krásno became an industrial area, where Reich's glass factory was founded,⁹⁶ Valašské Meziříčí was a cultural town centred on education and activities of various associations.⁹⁷

⁹³ Baletka, "Holocaust. K historii židovské komunity na území našeho okresu a k jejímu zániku."; Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 11.

⁹⁴ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 12.

⁹⁵ Jiří Štaif, *Revoluční léta 1848-1849 a České Země* (Praha: Historický ústav akademie věd, 1990).

⁹⁶ Jiří Mana, *Historie Skláren na Moravě* (Valašské Meziříčí: Občanské sdružení Valašské Athény, 2006).

⁹⁷ Zdeněk Kment, *Kulturní a Společenský Rozvoj Valašského Meziříčí v letech 1853 až 1948* (Valašské Meziříčí: ECHO Valašska, 2008).

2.2.1 Krásno nad Bečvou

The first mention of Jewish inhabitants in Krásno is earlier than in Valašské Meziříčí. In 1560, a Jew called Abraham, a creditor of Krásno's citizens, lived there in a manor house. There was also a distillery, in which Jews did business. However, they were not its owners; they were lodgers, paying rent of 1,100 gold pieces per year. The distillery also had a huge social importance. Its operator had the right to hold a sacred Torah scroll there and organize public worships. The Torah was kept in the distillery until a synagogue was constructed in Valašské Meziříčí in 1867 by Jews from Meziříčí and Krásno. Although only three Jewish families had a permit to live in Krásno, many more Jewish families lived there in the nineteenth century.⁹⁸

2.3 1848-1918

Although there is not much information about Jews in Meziříčí in the past, after 1848, many more sources are available. The population of Meziříčí in 1857 was only 1.1% Jewish, but by 1890, at its peak, the Jewish population had increased to 4.3% of the total. Jews were able to do business only since 1859, when the Trade Code abolished guild regulations and restrictions and allowed Jews to integrate into the economic life of society. In the same year, freedom of economic enterprise was introduced. Freedom to own property came in 1863.⁹⁹

Although anti-Semitism originated in ancient history, it had rather religious character to the nineteenth century. Later it was more about race than about religion. In the Czech lands, anti-Semitism has its roots mainly in the inclination of Jews towards German culture.¹⁰⁰

2.3.1 Jewish Businesses in Valašské Meziříčí

Most local Jews devoted themselves to small-scale trades, and it was more about the business than crafts. However, this was because Jews were banned in the past from engaging in crafts. Moreover, the most significant contribution of Jews and their capital was help in building the industrial structure of the whole region. They tried to use the economic possibilities of the region and utilize them in a market mechanism.¹⁰¹ Historically, the first factory license was obtained in Valašské Meziříčí in 1842 by the Jew Emanuel Haas, who operated a local distillery, making plum brandy. He was one of four authorized producers in Meziříčí at the time, and three of them were Jews.

⁹⁸ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 14-20.

⁹⁹ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 65.

¹⁰¹ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 21.

While Krásno became an industrial area with Reich's glass factory,¹⁰² Valašské Meziříčí was a cultural town developing, devoid of much business before 1900.¹⁰³ Jews in Meziříčí participated in German and Czech associations, as long as they were tolerated. However, in part because of the struggle between Czechs and Germans, and in part because Jews did not tend to assimilate, they gradually began to be expelled from the associations.¹⁰⁴

2.3.1.1 Reich Family

The Reich family is one of the founders of real industry in today's Valašské Meziříčí. For eight decades, they operating a glassworks not only in this town, but also in other places. In 1855 they even established a company headquarters in Vienna and had sales offices in other European cities. S. Reich Company significantly pushed the use of technical progress in its glassworks at a higher level, and in the nineteenth century became one of the most important glass producers in Europe.¹⁰⁵

In the economy of Valašské Meziříčí and its environs, Reichs deserved great merit. They employed at least 50 workers and, thanks to their positive influence, the Ministry of Commerce, despite the protests of the councillors, allowed them to set up an inn in a company compound. In 1872, a new gas generator was built, and in 1877 even a whole gasworks. By 1914, the company had 783 employees.

Reichs mainly financially supported the activities of other Jewish corporations and participated in charity and social events in Krásno. They were the largest taxpayer there. Overall, this family's contribution to the development of Meziříčí and Krásno is enormous.¹⁰⁶ All members of the Reich family were of German nationality and professed Jewish religion. In 1934, during the Great Depression, the company hit hard times, and the family first lost management influence and then ownership. The S. Reich Company was renamed to *Československé sklárny a.s.*, with its headquarters in Prague.¹⁰⁷

2.3.1.2 Jakob Moritz Schreiber

Jakob Schreiber was also one of the most important entrepreneurs of the town, who in 1859 applied to the district office in Valašské Meziříčí for permission to keep an inn. It caused

¹⁰² Jiří Mana, *Historie Skláren na Moravě* (Valašské Meziříčí: Občanské sdružení Valašské Athény, 2006), 6-15.

¹⁰³ Kment, *Kulturní a Společenský Rozvoj Valašského Meziříčí v letech 1853 až 1948*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 26; Kment. *Kulturní a Společenský Rozvoj Valašského Meziříčí v letech 1853 až 1948*.

¹⁰⁵ Mana, *Historie Skláren na Moravě*, 6-15; Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 5-15.

¹⁰⁶ Mana, *Historie Skláren na Moravě*, 6-15; Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁷ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 244.

great unrest among competitors, because Schreiber also owned the largest distillery in Moravia in Krásno and had the right to supply the liquor to the district of Rožnov and Meziříčí. He produced over 3,400 hectolitres of plum brandy a year, and his income was sizeable. He owned several estates in the neighbourhood, including a townhouse and several other houses. He also owned a large distillery in Křelov near Olomouc, and a large shop on the square in Olomouc. After he obtained the inn permit, he wanted to expand his business so he applied for another permit, to set up a vinegar in his house.

Later, the Schreiber and Reich families together established a ceramics factory. But after the factory burned down in 1869, they built a distillery. After the death of Jakob Schreiber, the concession passed to his son and, after his sudden death, to the widow Lina. However, Lina could not bear the pressure of Czech nationalists after 1918 and, like others, moved to Vienna.¹⁰⁸

2.3.1.3 Jacob and Joseph Kohn

Also, the Kohn family (father and son) expanded their business activities in Krásno after 1850. They contributed significantly to the industrial development and activities of the local Jewish religious society. They became successful producers of bentwood furniture. Their factory opened in 1870, and several other branches were gradually established in the municipalities of eastern Moravia. One of them was located directly on the premises of the Krásno synagogue.¹⁰⁹ Later, they set up a match factory in Krásno, employing about 50 workers, including children, who could work there until 1883, when child labour was banned. Although they also moved to Vienna after 1918, they were buried with other members of their family in the Jewish cemetery in Krásno, where they still have their tomb.¹¹⁰

2.3.2 Jews and the Census

Before 1848, today's Valašské Meziříčí had a small Jewish population. As the law did not allow Jews to leave the ghettos, they could not settle freely wherever they decided. Until 1894, Jews did not form an independent religious community here, so they had no right to keep registries. It is therefore difficult to map their movement and settlement. The 1857 census recorded 28 Jewish inhabitants. In the 1890 census, their numbers remained about

¹⁰⁸ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 24-25.

¹⁰⁹ Ladislav Baletka, "Židé," in *Okres Vsetín. Rožnovsko – Valašskomeziříčsko – Vsetínsko* (Brno: Hvězdárna Valašské Meziříčí, 2002), 320-328.

¹¹⁰ Baletka, "Židé," in *Okres Vsetín. Rožnovsko – Valašskomeziříčsko – Vsetínsko*, 320-328.

the same, but two-thirds of them listed German as their language. Unlike Valašské Meziříčí, in Krásno the influx of Jews in the mid-nineteenth century was much higher, mainly because of industrial development.¹¹¹ In 1900, in Krásno and Meziříčí lived 244 Jews.¹¹²

2.3.3 Jewish Associations in Valašské Meziříčí

The Jewish Religious Society for Valašské Meziříčí and Krásno was the oldest Jewish organization in which members congregated to talk about religion. It was approved in 1868 by the Moravian governorship in Brno, and its main purpose was teaching about Judaism and worship services. In 1886, the association had 40 members. The aforementioned Alois Reich was chairman of the association until 1894, when the association was dissolved. Before termination of its activities, the Jewish Religious Society managed property worth 33,837 gold coins. Its most valuable assets were the synagogue (25,000 gold coins), the residential house near the synagogue (1,000 gold coins), and the cemetery (3,000 gold coins). Movable property consisted of religious objects in the synagogue, worth 3,900 gold coins. All expenses related to the operation of the synagogue, school and cemetery were paid by Jews from their own financial resources, which were assessed according to the amount of tax returns of each individual.¹¹³

Other Jewish associations in Valašské Meziříčí were the Funeral Association and the Women's Charitable Association. The Funeral Association was in charge of participating in a dignified farewell to the deceased and also supervising the preparation of funeral ceremonies. The Women's Charitable Association was founded in 1882 as a social organization. The main reason for its establishment was growing anti-Semitism against Jews. In 1925, the association had 40 members. In 1939, the association was abolished due to the Nuremberg Laws.¹¹⁴ Several women, who managed to survive the Holocaust, tried but failed to re-establish the association.¹¹⁵

2.3.4 The Jewish Religious Community of Valašské Meziříčí-Vsetín

The Jewish Religious Society was deleted from the federal cadastre because it merged with the newly established Jewish Religious Community (ŽNO) in Valašské Meziříčí. In 1909, thanks to the separation of the political district, the name changed to ŽNO Valašské Meziříčí-

¹¹¹ Kment, *Kulturní a Společenský Rozvoj Valašského Meziříčí v letech 1853 až 1948*, 13.

¹¹² Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 168.

¹¹³ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 49; Kment, *Valašsko v područíhákového kříže*, 66-67.

¹¹⁴ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 72.

¹¹⁵ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 49.

Vsetín, based in Valašské Meziříčí. Between 1900 and 1915, the number of its members was around 750, and they paid a religious tax to the community. The last head of ŽNO was JUDr. Karel Heller, who was transported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp together with other members of the Jewish community on 14 September 1942.¹¹⁶ After the war, ŽNO attempted but failed to re-establish itself.¹¹⁷

2.3.5 The Valašské Meziříčí–Krásno Synagogue

In the religious life of Jews, the synagogue occupies a special place and represents the central institution of Judaism. In the synagogue, there used to be a study room, and sometimes even court proceedings were held there. Its main purpose, however, was worship.¹¹⁸ In the Czech lands, synagogues have always faced east, in the direction of Jerusalem. Currently, there are more than 200 synagogues in the Czech Republic, but only four of them are used for Judaic worship.¹¹⁹

The Valašské Meziříčí synagogue was built in 1867 on today's Vodní Street, just one hundred meters from the Parish Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. This was perceived as a provocation on the one hand and as an expression of the self-confidence of the Jewish community on the other. On March 10, 1870, the ownership rights to the new synagogue and residential house with garden were transferred to the Jewish Religious Society.¹²⁰

In a devastating flood in 1880, the Jewish Synagogue was considerably damaged, having been flooded up to one meter above ground level. After the flood, the synagogue did not operate for several years, until Josef Kohn offered to repair it. However, he did not keep his promise. He gave up the Jewish religion, and instead of repairing the synagogue, he set up a workroom for the production of chairs.¹²¹

In October 1899, the synagogue was damaged again during anti-Jewish demonstrations, which were the result of language measures and the Hilsner Affair. All the synagogue facilities were either destroyed and damaged, but the objects needed for worship were hidden by the Jews in time, and have been preserved until today. The synagogue survived without

¹¹⁶ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 277.

¹¹⁷ Jiří Flégl, "Příspěvek k dějinám Židovské náboženské obce Valašské Meziříčí, in *Vlastivědný věstník moravský* (Brno: Muzejní a vlastivědná společnost v Brně, 2014), 367-371.

¹¹⁸ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 168-169.

¹¹⁹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 598-600.

¹²⁰ Ladislav Baletka, "Synagoga ve Valašském Meziříčí-Krásně," a paper presented at the annual meeting Židé a Morava, Kroměříž, November 12, 2003, 171-181.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

any sizeable further harm until the end of World War I and the subsequent riots after the 1918 coup.¹²²

2.3.6 The Jewish Cemetery

The cemetery was established by the Jewish Support and Funeral Association, which was also its owner, in 1870. In the same year, the municipal council of Valašské Meziříčí decided to place it on three municipal parcels under the Church of St. Trinity. However, Jews then built the cemetery for unknown reasons in Krásno. In 1871, the first burial took place in the cemetery and the tombstone of the deceased has been preserved until today. In 1905, the chairman of the ŽNO, Mr. Heller, applied for permission to build a cemetery chapel and buy another parcel; thus, the cemetery was expanded by more than a third. This chapel was used for funerals until the mass deportation took place in Valašské Meziříčí.¹²³

2.4 The Way of Tolerance or Anti-Semitism?

In Valašské Meziříčí and Krásno nad Bečvou, there was no lasting tension between Jews and Christians until 1939. However, the historical sources up to that time are relatively sparse. In the past, we can speak of latent anti-Semitism, which manifested itself mainly in the form of ridicule and insults. Although the total number of Jews in Valašské Meziříčí and Krásno stood steadily around 5% of the total population, the electoral system allowed Jews to be represented in the municipal council. However, after 1918, it was more difficult to gain a position there. In the 1919 elections, Jews did not earn a seat. In the 1924 elections, the Jewish Party received only one mandate out of 36.¹²⁴

Even after the Revolution of 1848, when most restrictions and conditions were abolished for Jews, the anti-Semitic mood towards them persisted thanks to pre-existing prejudices. Moreover, anti-Semitism was also nourished by the Catholic church. Subsequently, under the slogan “fight against Germanization,” Czechs came up against Jews. The most dramatic aggression against Jews took place in Meziříčí in 1899. During a Sokol meeting held on the occasion of the centenary of František Palacký’s birth,¹²⁵ an announcement was made of a ritual murder of a Catholic girl from Polná by a Jewish man named Hilsner.¹²⁶ This came at

¹²² Ladislav Baletka, “Synagoga ve Valašském Meziříčí-Krásně,” a paper presented at the annual meeting Židé a Morava, Kroměříž, November 12, 2003, 171-181.

¹²³ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 60-61.

¹²⁴ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 12.

¹²⁵ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 12.

¹²⁶ Ctibor Rybár, et al., *Jewish Prague: Notes on History and Culture - A Guidebook* (Praha: TV Spektrum, 1991), 81.

the time of the abolition of the partial equality of German and Czech languages in the Czech lands.

This sequence of events gave rise to stormy demonstrations against Jews in eastern Moravia. In many towns, Jewish shops, inns and houses were plundered. In Valašské Meziříčí, on Saturday, the 21st of October, about 200 citizens gathered to demonstrate in the square, and broke several window panes. Then the procession went to Krásno, where the main demonstration took place. In the process, citizens smashed windows of Jewish houses and German buildings. Eventually they rushed to the synagogue, in which they ravaged everything they could. Finally, the participants broke up when the local policemen approached. Subsequently, the local newspaper *Noviny zpod Radhoště* urged Catholics not to be violent towards Jews, but it also noted that Christians should not live with Jews under one roof.¹²⁷ Overall, this newspaper was misanthropic towards Jews.

At the turn of 1914-1915, the inhabitants of Wallachia had to pass a test of tolerance towards Jews.¹²⁸ About 1,200 war refugees from Halič settled in municipalities in this district,¹²⁹ and their stay not only complicated local people's lives, but also reduced their standard of living due to a lack of food and goods. This situation produced friendships among some Jewish and Christian families, who helped each other through difficult times.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ "Židovské rozumy," *Noviny zpod Radhoště*, January 20, 1900.

¹²⁸ "Postižení válkou na Valašsko," *Noviny zpod Radhoště*, September 5, 1914.

¹²⁹ Daniela Srbová, "Židovští váleční uprchlíci z Haliče a Bukoviny za 1. světové války v dnešním okrese Vsetín," (paper presented at the annual meeting Židé a Morava, Kroměříž, November 7, 2001).

¹³⁰ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 68-71.

3 JEWISH LIFE IN VALAŠSKÉ MEZIŘÍČÍ DURING THE FIRST REPUBLIC

Based on the Declaration of Independence of October 18, issued by the first Czechoslovak President Tomas Garrigue Masaryk in Washington D.C., the First Republic was established.¹³¹ It consisted of Bohemia, Moravia and a part of Silesia, as the Czech historical provinces, and was further enlarged to include areas of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia.¹³² People in Valašské Meziříčí had mixed feelings about the independent Czechoslovak state. Most residents celebrated, but supporters of Germany were still loyal to the Habsburgs. German inscriptions began to be erased, and national committees started to form. Soldiers and Jews, who fled from anti-Jewish pogroms in the Slovak part of the new republic, began to pour into the town.

Anger had accumulated as a result of war hardships, leading to anti-Jewish riots in some cities. However, in Valašské Meziříčí, there were no riots against the Jews after the declaration of an independent state, and the situation was calm. There were disputes for another reason: the connection between Valašské Meziříčí and Krásno.¹³³ Specifically Jews, who were represented in Krásno by the Reich family, who professed German nationality and Jewish religion,¹³⁴ were against the union of these two municipalities.¹³⁵ Krásno always complied with their wishes regarding business, but in Meziříčí the situation was different. Nevertheless, in 1924, these two municipalities merged.

That year, elections were also held, in which seven political parties competed, including the Jewish Party.¹³⁶ As President Masaryk liked the Wallachia region, he visited the town several times, firstly in 1924. During his visit to Meziříčí's square, the Reich's factory brass band played. The president also toured the Reich glass factory.¹³⁷

The New York Stock Exchange crash in October 1929, which also influenced the Czechoslovak economy a year later, was the beginning of a long-lasting crisis, a decline in production and mass unemployment. In the Reich's factory, production was reduced, wages decreased and people were laid off. In 1933, the highest unemployment rate (63%) was recorded in the city. At the same time, incomes fell by 40% compared to the previous year.¹³⁸

¹³¹ Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 27.

¹³² Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 27; Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 949.

¹³³ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 225-230.

¹³⁴ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 24; Mana, *Historie Skláren na Moravě*, 6-15.

¹³⁵ Mana. *Historie Skláren na Moravě*, 6-15.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 235.

¹³⁸ Nekuda, *Okres Vsetín – Rožnovsko, Valašskomeziříčsko, Vsetínsko*, 257.

The number of executions increased by half. This started the communist demonstrations in the country. In 1935, the Reich Company was abolished, replaced by the company *Československé sklárny a.s.* People began to feel threatened by Hitler's Germany.¹³⁹

3.1 Jewry in Numbers

During the First Republic, Jews for the first time since 1851 could choose Jewish nationality in the census. In 1921, 50.5% of Jews claimed Czechoslovak nationality, 34.5% claimed German nationality, and 15% claimed Jewishness. In 1930, fewer Jews declared themselves to be German and more to be Jewish. Jews in Moravia and Silesia were more inclined to Vienna than to Prague. Therefore, in Moravia and Silesia in 1921, only 16% of Jews claimed Czechoslovak nationality, 35% German and 48% Jewish.¹⁴⁰

In 1921, when the first census took place after World War I, 3,754 inhabitants lived in Valašské Meziříčí, of which 3,619 claimed Czechoslovak nationality. The rest claimed to be German and Jewish. Jewish residents of the town usually resided in the city centre. The largest population was in the town square, where Jews inhabited around ten houses. After 1921, however, the number of Jewish inhabitants only decreased.¹⁴¹

3.2 The Synagogue during the First Republic

The synagogue survived without harm the period of the First World War and also the period of unrest in 1918.¹⁴² It was rebuilt in 1921, but its external appearance did not change. The synagogue was equipped with new furniture, tools and liturgical objects. Up to 180 people could attend the services after the reconstruction. In 1933, the building became a target of interest of unknown thieves, who broke into it and stole silver objects worth 16,000 CZK.

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¹³⁹ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 242-246.

¹⁴⁰ Pěkný, *Historie ždů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 516.

¹⁴¹ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 30-35.

¹⁴² Baletka, "Synagoga ve Valašském Meziříčí-Krásně," 171-181.

¹⁴³ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 53.

4 THE HOLOCAUST IN VALAŠSKÉ MEZIŘÍČÍ

World War II, which killed up to 72 million people, was the result of Germany's dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versailles.¹⁴⁴ When the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was proclaimed in March 1939, some Jews did not view the situation badly, and a few even welcomed the invasion of German armed forces. Only a few, who had misgivings about the situation, managed to emigrate at the end of April 1939. To do so, they had to have sufficient financial resources and possibilities. The rest were deported and killed. From Meziříčí alone, more than 150 Jews died in concentration camps.¹⁴⁵

Since March 1939, the German occupation authorities began to issue anti-Jewish measures. In the town after the occupation of Germany on March 15, 1939,¹⁴⁶ even the names and photos of all Jews killed in World War I had to be removed from the memorials, because Germany was trying to erase positive memories of the Jews.¹⁴⁷ Then the Nazis proceeded to segregate the Jews. Already in March 1939, decrees came into force prohibiting the sale or donation of businesses that were partly or wholly owned by Jews. In July, a decree was also issued in Kroměříž on the implementation of the inventory of non-Aryan lands. The Germans were mainly interested in seizing the property of Bohemian and Moravian Jews before their deportation.¹⁴⁸

4.1 Nuremberg Laws and the Aryanization of Jewish Property

These laws were issued in 1935 by the Nazis in German Nuremberg. According to them, only Reich citizen could have civil and political rights. Reich citizens were, for the protection of Aryan blood, also forbidden to marry people of mixed race, whether they were Jews, Gypsies, blacks or others. On the basis of these laws, non-Aryans were excluded from society, deprived of their property, and then subjected to genocide.¹⁴⁹

In October 1942, all Meziříčí Jews were transported to Ostrava and then to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. They could carry 50kg of luggage with them, but this luggage never made it to Theresienstadt. From the ghetto, the road led to the extermination camps in Germany, Poland, Belarus and Estonia. Jews were then killed in gas chambers or shot.¹⁵⁰ The Germans moved into to some of Jewish houses in Meziříčí after the deportation. The

¹⁴⁴ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 8.

¹⁴⁵ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 33,70-71.

¹⁴⁶ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 277.

¹⁴⁷ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 70-71, 117.

¹⁴⁸ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 45,86.

¹⁴⁹ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 284.

¹⁵⁰ Erich Kulka, *Holocaust na Vsetínsku: 1939-1945*, edited by Silvestr Kazmír (Vsetín: S. Kazmír, 2011), 3.

lawyer Heller's house became a federal house, housing a nursing home for German mothers and infants.¹⁵¹

In the Reich Chief Security Office, led by Heinrich Himmler, they referred to genocide as *Endlösung der Judenfrage* - the "final solution to the Jews." According to this solution, Jews should be firstly used as a labour force and then destroyed.¹⁵² The Nazis initially focused on the ten richest families in the Protectorate, seizing their property. Subsequently, the Gestapo, in cooperation with the occupation and protectorate authorities, carried out searches in businesses and households and thus obtained control over Jewish property during deportations. Seized possessions, both real and personal, were then redistributed.¹⁵³

Once the Nuremberg Laws were instituted in the Protectorate, Jews could no longer manage their property. Their enterprises were managed by German administrators. In November 1939, Aryan administrators were appointed to oversee the following Jewish companies in Valašské Meziříčí:

1. *Julie Kulková, production and distribution of liquor*
2. *Marek Quittner, general store*
3. *Erich Löw, ready-to-wear trade*
4. *Katuše Pěnicová, general store*
5. *Hugo and Robert Altenstein, glue production*
6. *Josef Löw, distillery and inn*
7. *Bruno Bača, trade with coal and wood*
8. *Max Rosenfeld, inn*
9. *Arnošt Knöpfelmacher, coal trade*
10. *Hanna Tochová, production of knitted goods*
11. *František Braun, inn*
12. *Paula Glesingerová, grocery and junk shop*
13. *Josef Buchbinder, old iron trade*¹⁵⁴

These businesses were administered by NSGWP¹⁵⁵ officials. The appointment of these officials was the first stage of the Aryanization of Jewish property. The Aryan administrators became owners, and the property was credited to them. The German occupiers had the intention to seize Jewish property from the beginning. Firstly, the companies with the best economic results were given to Aryan owners. Later, the Germans confiscated the property of the Jewish Religious Community, the Jewish Association and Chevra Kadisha

¹⁵¹ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 284.

¹⁵² Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 340-341.

¹⁵³ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 73-74; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 360-369.

¹⁵⁴ Tomáš Baletka and Zdeněk Pomkla, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí* (Valašské Meziříčí: Český svaz bojovníků za svobodu, 2017), 111-144.

¹⁵⁵ National Socialist German Workers' Party, a.k.a. the Nazi Party.

Association.¹⁵⁶ In 1940, on the basis of these laws, all Jews had to hand over all shares, items of gold, platinum or silver, gems and pearls.

Subsequently, Jews were segregated and restricted of fundamental principles of human life. The main aim was to raise awareness of the inferiority and uselessness of this race. Gradually, they were forbidden to attend all social events and to visit all businesses, were deprived of unemployment benefits and were deployed into forced labour. They were not allowed to move freely even in some parts of the town and were given an 8 pm curfew. Moreover, there were many other measures that restricted the freedom of Jews. In 1941, the Reich Interior Minister even ordered Jews to be marked with the Star of David with the inscription Jude.¹⁵⁷ A year later, the Jews were allowed to stay only in a closed settlement area, which meant the town of Theresienstadt, and all Jews from Meziříčí were deported there.¹⁵⁸

Jews who committed the slightest offense found themselves in the Gestapo prison in Vsetín and were imprisoned before being transported. Among the Jews of Valašské Meziříčí, these included JUDr. Rudolf Altenstein or Leo Knöpfelmacher. For economic reasons, the Nazis tried to use Jews as full-fledged workers until the very last moment. Besides adults, young boys and girls had to work too. Until the last days before the deportation to the concentration camps, Jews were forced to perform manual labor, which they did in divided working groups. Only five of the deported Jews from Valašské Meziříčí are known to have survived the war. They moved after the war to England or the United States. Some Jews also changed their surnames after the war, to seem less Jewish.¹⁵⁹

4.2 Valašské Meziříčí from the Munich Agreement

After the Munich Agreement in 1938, anti-Semitism towards Jews increased, thanks largely to the inclination of Jews towards German culture in Moravia. Moreover, anti-Semitism was spread by the newspapers. In response, some of Jewish inhabitants of Meziříčí moved to Vienna, and the Jewish population of Meziříčí decreased by 20%.¹⁶⁰ Unlike *Noviny zpod Radhoště*, which rarely wrote about Jews, *Lubina* did not resist being latently anti-Semitic, portraying Jews as a lower race. One of its articles stated that the citizens of Meziříčí do not like Jews because they are not able or do not want to learn Czech language, and because

¹⁵⁶ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 284.

¹⁵⁷ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 284.

¹⁵⁸ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 73-74.

¹⁵⁹ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 92-96; Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 30.

¹⁶⁰ Baletka *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí* 71-72.

Jewish business and factory owners employ only Jews or Germans.¹⁶¹ In the second half of the 1930s, the Czech Republic became a refuge for several Jewish families who fled from fascist Germany. Jews moved to Meziříčí mainly from the surrounding towns, for example from Brno, because Jews were banned to stay there, or from Nový Jičín. During this, Jewish refugees received help from the town, associations and district authorities. At that time, Meziříčí was one of four cities in Moravia that did not welcome the Germans.¹⁶² According to available sources, about 50 Jews moved to the town at this time, thinking Meziříčí was a safe haven for them.

Of course, the only real escape was emigration, but that was not easy at the beginning of the war. The biggest obstacle was the fact that in neighbouring countries relations with Jews were hostile. Jews also suffered from a language barrier and had difficulties in gaining visas to foreign countries. After the outbreak of the war in 1939, emigration was legally impossible, so many Jews did not emigrate. The decision was accompanied by a misconception that the war would not be so bad, because they had experienced similar waves of hatred in the past.¹⁶³

4.2.1 Heller's List

At the command of the German occupation authorities, the mayor of the Jewish Religious Community of Valašské Meziříčí-Vsetín, JUDr. Karel Heller, had to draft the "List of Jews in the district of Valašské Meziříčí" and "List of Jews of the non-Moses religion." It originally contained 157 names, but later another six were added. The vast majority of those on the list did not survive the camps. The author of the list was himself transported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942.¹⁶⁴ The best-known survivor from Wallachia is Ilse Eichner, who after the war moved to Georgia, in the United States, where she lives under the name of Ilse Reiner.¹⁶⁵

4.2.2 Synagogue after the Occupation

The fate of the synagogue fell into darkness at the beginning of the German occupation in 1939. Already in the first months of the occupation, many of the surrounding synagogues

¹⁶¹ Miroslav Jankot, "Důsledky Mnichovské dohody pro valašskomeziříčský okres," Bachelor's thesis, Palacký University in Olomouc, 2017, 20-49; Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 68-69; Baletka, "Židé," 320-328.

¹⁶² Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 40.

¹⁶³ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 73-75.

¹⁶⁴ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 45,86.

¹⁶⁵ Ilse Reiner, *Through the Eyes of a Child* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2006), 1; Marie Šidlová, "Ilsa Reiner je čestnou občankou Vsetína," Město Vsetín: oficiální web města, 2011.

were destroyed. The first local synagogue burned by the Nazis was the synagogue in Vsetín, on March 20, 1939.¹⁶⁶ However, the synagogue in Meziříčí was left untouched, and in 1940 the town began negotiations with the Jewish Religious Community on the purchase of the synagogue. These negotiations did not produce an agreement, however, possibly because of the weak bargaining position of the Jewish community. Then, in 1941 a statement was issued that a synagogue is not a place of religious purposes, but a gathering place and a focus of illegal whispered propaganda, and all synagogues should be demolished. As a result, the building was preserved but the interior was dismantled, and in November 1942, the religious objects were moved to Prague.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 70.

¹⁶⁷ Ladislav Baletka, "Synagoga ve Valašském Meziříčí-Krásně," 171-181.

5 POST-HOLOCAUST JEWISH LIFE IN VALAŠSKÉ MEZIŘÍČÍ

The post-war period, 1945-1948, was a time of struggle for the political character of the state. After the liberation of Valašské Meziříčí on May 6, 1945, 33 severely damaged buildings were registered, including a synagogue. None of the Jewish citizens of Meziříčí who were interned before the mass deportations survived. Of the people who were deported as a part of the so-called final solution to the Jewish question, only 11 survived.¹⁶⁸ According to Jan Smutek, 174 Jewish people died during the Second World War in the Valašské Meziříčí district as a result of racial persecution, including 84 men, 73 women and 17 children. The anti-Semitic protest against the Jewish population was waged mainly by the newspaper *Lubina*, whose owner hated them. However, a few years after the war broke out, the newspaper stopped publishing, due to wartime paper shortages.¹⁶⁹

As for the Jews in Moravia, they were not without fault. They were an ethnic group that did not have deep roots in Moravia. They mostly came in the second half of the nineteenth century and did not care for deeper contact with the rest of the population. The differences in their religion, business interests and culture also contributed to their lack of assimilation. Because they mostly spoke German or Yiddish,¹⁷⁰ the Czech inhabitants did not understand them and thus considered the Jews a foreign element. They were good businessmen and entrepreneurs, but they generally did not engage in charity and also did not lend without a significant profit. Some residents, who lost their property to Jews, believed they were deliberately deprived of it. This makes it understandable that Czechs were not overly interested in their fate. Probably this attitude was also partially contributed to the historical prejudices and the church-supported view of their guilt for killing Christ.¹⁷¹

Information about the concentration camps was not published anywhere except the BBC's promotional sessions, and there was no intervention of other superpowers. According to Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, the laxity of the Western powers contributed to the expansion and acceleration of the "final solution" to the Jewish question.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 297-300.

¹⁶⁹ Jan Smutek, *Odboj Valašska a nacistická persekuce bývalého okresu Val. Meziříčí 1939-1945* (Valašské Meziříčí, 1968); I, II, rkp. SOKA Vsetín, Sbíрка rukopisů, inv. č. 35, 36, s. 235; Miroslav Jankot, "Důsledky Mnichovské dohody pro valašskomeziříčský okres," 49.

¹⁷⁰ Yiddish is the language of the Ashkenazim, central and eastern European Jews and their descendants.

Written in the Hebrew alphabet, it became one of the world's most widespread languages, appearing in most countries with a Jewish population by the 19th century.

¹⁷¹ Kulka, *Holocaust na Vsetínsku*, 9.

¹⁷² Kulka, *Holocaust na Vsetínsku*, 23.

5.1 Restitution of property to Jews

According to Kárny's estimation, the Nazis managed to seize Jewish property in the amount of 20 billion CZK. Thus, some Holocaust scholars believe that the desire to seize Jewish property played an equally important role in the Nazi "final solution" as racial hatred. Because less than 10% of Czech and Slovak Jews survived the Holocaust, the issue of property restitution has become a major source of disagreement. After the war, the Jewish property that had been Aryanized was first confiscated by decree of President Beneš and then, with a few exceptions, was entrusted to the care of the National Property Administration of the Emigration Fund. Only a small part was returned to the previous Jewish owners or their descendants. Most of the houses in Valašské Meziříčí were renovated after the war in connection with complex housing and infrastructure construction in the town.¹⁷³

Restitution became a source of envy, and confiscation decisions were often unfair and harmed the original owners. The controversial and complicated process of restitution was violently interrupted in 1948. Until then, only 3,000 claims for the return of property out of a total of 16,000 were resolved. Then the property was nationalized. After the end of the communist regime in 1989, a working commission was set up to evaluate the property wrongs of Czech victims affected by the Holocaust. The result of its work was the "Law on the Alleviation of Certain Property Injustices to Victims of the Holocaust," passed by Parliament in 2000.¹⁷⁴

After 1989, some Jewish property remained the property of the state or region, and most of the property of the Jewish families passed to the town of Valašské Meziříčí. Later, Mr. Baletka found that the fates of individual properties were diverse, and that often the rightful owners of formerly Jewish properties are the descendants of Meziříčí Jews living in unknown places abroad.¹⁷⁵

5.2 Jewish victims of World War II in Valašské Meziříčí

Rudolf Altenstein worked as a lawyer in the town. As a member of the local resistance, he was arrested in 1939 as a hostile person. He later died in Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹⁷⁶ The rest of

¹⁷³ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 370-374; Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 96.

¹⁷⁴ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, 376.

¹⁷⁵ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 96.

¹⁷⁶ Tomáš Baletka and Zdeněk Pomkla, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí* (Valašské Meziříčí: Valašské Meziříčí, 2017), 79; František Chovančík and Jaroslav Švehla, *Almanach obětí nacismu v letech 1939-1945 v okrese Vsetín* (Vsetín: Vsetín, 1990), 75.

his family (Emil, Otto Solomon, Robert, Julie, Rudolph, Marie, Olga) was according to the police application, “evacuated” to Ostrava, from which the family was later transported to Theresienstadt and then deported to the concentration camps Malý Trosinec, Treblinka, or Zamošči, where they were murdered.¹⁷⁷

Bruno Bača, who opened a shop with coal, wood and construction supplies in the town, was deported to Theresienstadt in 1942 and then to Malý Trosinec, where he died. His business was Aryanized in 1939, like most other Jewish businesses, but Bruno continued to work in the Aryan-led business until his deportation.¹⁷⁸

Karel Heller, who was chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Valašské Meziříčí-Vsetín, was interrogated by the Gestapo several times before his deportation. He housed a lot of Jewish refugees from the borderland in his house. Moreover, he and his wife supported people active in the illegal communist movement.¹⁷⁹

Vítězslav Herz was a resident of Meziříčí with a temporary apartment in Nový Jičín. Deciding to stay in Meziříčí, he left his apartment in Nový Jičín abandoned. After returning to Nový Jičín, he found the house looted and robbed by "unknown perpetrators." He died in Meziříčí in 1942.¹⁸⁰

Some Jews fled to Meziříčí from Jičín, which fell to Hitler's Germany. However, at that time, it was not easy to find an apartment or house in the town, so several of Meziříčí's residents provided them with shelter. Specifically, the Jewish family Honigwachs firstly took shelter with the forger Žalmánek, and then in the house of Abraham Lipschutz.¹⁸¹

Max London had a company that manufactured saws in the town, employing 15 workers. In 1942, the company was Aryanized and he was deported to Treblinka and murdered with his whole family. Zikmund London had a factory producing agricultural

¹⁷⁷ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí* 111-112; Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 97-98.

¹⁷⁸ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 112; Chovančík and Švehla, *Almanach obětí nacismu v letech 1939-1945 v okrese Vsetín*, 80.

¹⁷⁹ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 117-118; František Chovančík and Jaroslav Švehla, *Almanach obětí nacismu v letech 1939-1945 v okrese Vsetín* Chovančík and Švehla, *Almanach obětí nacismu v letech 1939-1945 v okrese Vsetín*, 81; M. Podzemný, Vlkovský F. and R. Sekerka, *Památník těch, kdo svým osudem vykoupili znovunabytí svobody v letech nacistické okupace* (Valašské Meziříčí: Valašské Meziříčí, 2000), 66.

¹⁸⁰ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 120; Podzemný, Vlkovský and Sekerka, *Památník těch, kdo svým osudem vykoupili znovunabytí svobody v letech nacistické okupace*, 66.

¹⁸¹ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 123; Chovančík and Švehla, *Almanach obětí nacismu v letech 1939-1945 v okrese Vsetín*, 82; Podzemný, Vlkovský and Sekerka, *Památník těch, kdo svým osudem vykoupili znovunabytí svobody v letech nacistické okupace*, 67.

machinery, which employed 50 workers. Its production was stopped in 1939, and Zikmund was then transported with his family to Auschwitz, where he died.¹⁸²

All members of the Reich family declared themselves to be of German nationality, and all renounced the Jewish religion before the war. That is why they were inscribed on Heller's list as Jews of non-Moses religion.¹⁸³

Adolf Wessely immigrated to Meziříčí in 1934 and worked as a senior officer of the Jewish business *Monti a Spol.* After the Aryanization, a German named Leopold became the administrator of the company, who reported him to the Gestapo for stealing and for damaging to the empire. Later he died in Auschwitz.¹⁸⁴

Manželé Joleschovi, who owned the knitting company, were deported in 1939, and the operation of their company was suspended. In 1941, the company was confiscated by the Nazis and renamed Monti's Knitting Company. After the war in 1945, production was resumed by the company's partner, Vítězslav Kohn. Soon in 1948, the factory was nationalized by a decision of the Provincial National Committee in Brno and handed over to the national enterprise *Moravskoslezské pletářské závody n.p.*¹⁸⁵

Distilleries were traditionally in the hands of Jewish entrepreneurs. Lina Schreiber's distillery had already closed in 1918, but the distillery of Julius Rosenfeld was Aryanised.¹⁸⁶

5.2.1 Jews involved in the anti-Nazi resistance

Arnošt Knopfmacher was a Jewish merchant with a transport company, and later also with petrol and oil. Since 1920, he employed 5 workers in Meziříčí, and his company showed a revenue of 203,900K in 1937. Arnošt had been the target of anti-Semitic attacks since the beginning of the First Republic by the newspaper *Lubina*. After the occupation, his company was also confiscated by Nazis. Then he joined the anti-Nazi resistance. His son, Leo Knopfmacher, was involved in the resistance too. Max Reiss was also one of the Jewish inhabitants of the town who took part in anti-German activities. For this he was arrested by

¹⁸² Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 127-30; Chovančík and Švehla, *Almanach obětí nacismu v letech 1939-1945 v okrese Vsetín*, 83; Podzemný, Vlkovský and Sekerka, *Památník těch, kdo svým osudem vykoupili znovunabytí svobody v letech nacistické okupace*, 69.

¹⁸³ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 136; Chovančík and Švehla, *Almanach obětí nacismu v letech 1939-1945 v okrese Vsetín*, 84, Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 144-145.

¹⁸⁴ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 143; Chovančík and Švehla, *Almanach obětí nacismu v letech 1939-1945 v okrese Vsetín*, 85.

¹⁸⁵ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkła, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 248, 337.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 251.

the Vsetín Gestapo and died in Auschwitz less than two months later. His wife died in Malý Trostinec a year later.¹⁸⁷

5.2.2 Legacy of the War

According to documents available in the Regional Archive in Ostrava and the State District Archive in Vsetín, most Jews from Valašské Meziříčí were executed in concentration camps during World War II. With a few exceptions, they were first transported from the train station in Valašské Meziříčí to Ostrava, from where they were deported to Theresienstadt within a few days. Those who survived Theresienstadt mostly ended up in the concentration camps Malý Trostinec, Treblinka, Auschwitz or Dachau. The town's few Holocaust survivors moved to either the United States, England, or Israel.

Although almost no one returned to Meziříčí after the war, the data show that there were, during the war, rather friendly relationships between the Jews and other citizens. According to these archival records, even a few Jewish families that escaped to Meziříčí after the Munich Agreement and subsequent occupation of the Sudetenland were accommodated by the non-Jewish inhabitants.¹⁸⁸ That they were in good standing within the town is also evidenced by the fact that several Jewish residents participated in the anti-Nazi resistance, so they had confidence in the local population, and the local population had confidence in them.¹⁸⁹ Michael Honey, the Holocaust survivor from Nový Jičín, claims that in Meziříčí there were more friendly and connected relationships between Jews and gentiles than in Nový Jičín, where the majority of the population was comprised of ethnic Germans.¹⁹⁰

According to these documents, it can also be concluded that Jews had a significant economic influence in the city. Most of them had their own businesses in which they employed other citizens. If they were not traders, they worked in agriculture or were private teachers. Moreover, several Jewish doctors and lawyers also lived in the town during the war. Whether it was taxes, local economic development, or employment, Jewish factories and businesses actively contributed to the local and national economies.¹⁹¹

Finally, based on the evidence, it can be concluded that the Czech residents of Valašské Meziříčí did not participate, either actively or passively, in the Holocaust against their Jewish

¹⁸⁷ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 137.

¹⁸⁸ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 90.

¹⁸⁹ Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkła, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 280.

¹⁹⁰ We Remember Jewish Nový Jičín & Jewish Valašské Meziříčí! (Czechoslovakia), "Michael Honey: Commemoration of Valašské Meziříčí," Accessed April 5, 2020, <http://www.zchor.org/valasske.htm#commemoration>.

¹⁹¹ Baletka and Pomkła, *Oběti II. světové války z řad občanů správního okresu Valašské Meziříčí*, 111-145.

neighbors, even though they may have had socioeconomic motives for doing so. Just the opposite, it seems Czechs felt sorry for their Jewish neighbors and assisted them when and if they could.

5.3 Gestapo Informers

Even in Meziříčí, there were people who reported to the Gestapo during these difficult times, mainly for money or for personal reasons. Besides money, they also received alcohol, cigarettes, extra food stamps, or any other scarce wartime commodity. However, these people did not report only on Jews, but on all those who were suspected of resistance activities and other illegal activities; so it was not a question of hatred of Jews.

Albertína Trčálková was one of the most famous informers of Valašské Meziříčí, who cooperated with the Germans joyfully and welcomed the occupation.¹⁹² As a part of the Aryanization, she received the popular *U Střítěských* inn from the German authorities, which was later called *The Jew Inn*. Its original owner did not return from Auschwitz. After cooperating with the Germans, she was after the war sentenced to death by hanging.¹⁹³ Ludvík Fischer, who worked at the Reich glassworks, also served as a confidant of the Vsetín Gestapo. After the war, he was convicted of alleging two Jewish workers were sabotaging the production of goods. They both died in Auschwitz. After the war, he was convicted and sentenced to on 6 years in prison.¹⁹⁴

5.4 The Communist Era

During the communist regime, only the names of non-Jewish victims were written on the monuments, and only after the Velvet Revolution, did Jews get their place on the monuments too. Michael Honey claimed that during the communist regime, the town “killed any memory of these Jews who were neighbours of the townspeople of Valašské Meziříčí.” He also points out that this happened because anti-Semitic behaviour occurred in Meziříčí in this era.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹²Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 278.

¹⁹³ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 289; Baletka, Baletka, Čermáková and Pomkla, *Valašské Meziříčí*, 304.

¹⁹⁴ Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 277, 289-291.

¹⁹⁵ Kulka, *Holocaust na Vsetínsku: 1939-1945*, 11; We Remember Jewish Nový Jičín & Jewish Valašské Meziříčí! (Czechoslovakia), “Michael Honey: Commemoration of Valašské Meziříčí.” (accessed April 5, 2020).

5.5 The Jewish Religious Community after the War

After the war, a few of the Jewish Religious Community members returned. However, they soon left the town, and some even gave up their religious beliefs after the terrible experiences of the war. The post-war chairman of the Jewish Religious Community was Marek Svoboda from Vsetín, to where the community's seat was moved. Later, the seat of the entire region was moved to Kyjov.¹⁹⁶ Since the reform of the territorial administrative arrangement in 1960, Valašské Meziříčí has belonged to the Jewish Religious Community district in Ostrava.¹⁹⁷

5.6 The Destruction of the Synagogue

During the withdrawal of the German army in 1945, the synagogue was damaged by the destruction of a bridge over the Bečva River. Later, junk from evicted German flats was brought into the building. The few Jews who returned from the concentration camps did not have enough power to repair the synagogue. However, the Religious Community of the Czechoslovak Church became interested in the building, as did local firefighters, who wanted it for a fire station. On December 14, 1946, a judicial expert estimate the value of the synagogue, including the adjacent buildings, at CZK 192,000, of which the value of the synagogue itself was CZK 134,269. According to the chairman of the Local National Committee, the synagogue building was not used and fell into disrepair. However, the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in Prague insisted that the synagogue should be used for religious purposes.¹⁹⁸

On June 23, 1949, a purchase contract was concluded and the town became the owner of the synagogue. The synagogue was demolished the following year.¹⁹⁹ This ended the history of the building. After, it turned out that the locality was unsuitable for the construction of a fire station, as the land did not provide a sufficiently fast exit for vehicles. In 1949, the town also bought a house next to the synagogue, which once served as the cantor's residence. After 1989, a private buyer bought the lands. The plot is still bare, and

¹⁹⁶ Petr Sedlák, "Obnova a organizace židovských náboženských obcí v českých zemích po skončení druhé světové války," in *Židé a Morava. Sborník z konference konané v Muzeu Kroměřížska dne 9. listopadu 2005* (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2006), 192-201.

¹⁹⁷ Jiří Flégl, "Příspěvek k dějinám Židovské náboženské obce Valašské Meziříčí.", 367-371.

¹⁹⁸ Ladislav Baletka. "Synagoga ve Valašském Meziříčí-Krásně.", 17.

¹⁹⁹ We Remember Jewish Nový Jičín & Jewish Valašské Meziříčí! (Czechoslovakia), "Michael Honey: Commemoration of Valašské Meziříčí." (accessed April 5, 2020); Kment, *Valašsko v područí hákového kříže*, 66.

there is a Holocaust memorial on it, which was unveiled on September 13, 2004, on the eve of the anniversary of the mass deportation of Jews from Valašské Meziříčí.²⁰⁰

5.7 Termination of the Jewish Cemetery

After the war, the Local National Committee damaged the cemetery by parking hearses there. Subsequently, through the bribery of one representative of the Jewish Religious Community, the Local National Committee obtained approval to demolish the cemetery. This occurred in 1956, except for its reverential part. The bricks of the cemetery wall were then used to create a tomb for German soldiers who died in Valašské Meziříčí during the war. That same year, the cemetery became a quarry, where the head stones of the deceased were ruthlessly destroyed and foundations for the construction of new houses were created of them. Of the original 200 stones, only 18 have survived.

Although the Jewish cemetery survived World War II almost unscathed, it was devastated during the post-war period. Property rights were violated, and non-Jewish citizens developed an arrogance for cultural and historical values.²⁰¹ The greatest desecration of the Jewish community occurred when the communist town council built a shaft of bricks to hold the remains of German soldiers and the SS, who committed the greatest monstrosities on the Jews. Today, only a small portion of the Jewish cemetery has been preserved, and the rest of the land is owned by the town. Although the protestant pastor of the town was ordered by the communists to clear the cemetery of its Jewish tombstones, he secretly arranged them into a Star of David, so they are preserved until today.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 54-59.

²⁰¹ Baletka, *Židé v dějinách Valašského Meziříčí*, 60-64.

²⁰² We Remember Jewish Nový Jičín & Jewish Valašské Meziříčí! (Czechoslovakia), "Michael Honey: Commemoration of Valašské Meziříčí."

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this bachelor thesis was to determine whether the Jews in Valašské Meziříčí were persecuted during World War II by the townspeople, or not, and for what reasons. To be able to answer this question in my work, it was necessary to examine the history of the Jews from the very beginning of their settlement in the town. To compare the differences with the rest of the country, the first chapter was written, in which the work deals with the history of Jews throughout the Czech lands. Subsequently, it was necessary to find connections between the general regulations for Jews in the country and their observance in the town. Even though Jews in the Czech lands had to face many attacks and hostile behaviour from the other citizens throughout history, in Valašské Meziříčí, the relationships between them were more tolerable. Firstly, the nobility protected them and secondly, they became an important part of the local economy, even in the early times where they started their successful distillery businesses. During the Second World War, Jewry lost its basic human rights. Although the Nazis were responsible for the destruction of the Jewish community in Valašské Meziříčí, its residents helped the Jewish families during the war, and a few of them also cooperated together with Jews in anti-Nazi resistance. A reason for this might be found in the population composition. Residents of the city were mainly of Czech nationality and did not incline towards German culture. The synagogue and Jewish cemetery survived the war, only to be destroyed by the communists a decade later. This era also witnessed increased anti-Semitism nationwide, but not in Valašské Meziříčí, because there were simply no Jews left to discriminate against. The once thriving Jewish community of Valašské Meziříčí is now remembered in the town mainly by the Holocaust memorial (see appendix I), which is located on the land where the synagogue once stood. In the town, many historians tried to collect information about Jewish victims of the Holocaust and write about them for the next generations. One of the famous researchers of the Jewish community in Valašské Meziříčí was Ladislav Baletka, who is cited in this thesis often. He died in 2011, but now his son, who is currently the director of the State District Archive in Vsetín, continues with this activity.

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APPENDIX I

The Holocaust Memorial in Valašské Meziříčí

