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The Rediscovery of the Jews

Czech History Books since 1989

The history of the Jews in the Bohemian lands was hardly mentioned in Czechoslovakia under Communist rule. Since 1989, this has gradually begun to change. However, most of the schoolbooks that appeared after the political upheaval continued to ignore Jewish issues. Only in 1995 were Jewish topics given more space. The negative image of the State of Israel was also revised. The emphasis of history books from the late 1990s was on the representation of Jews as victims, in particular victims of the Nazis. However, some of the textbooks that have appeared in the last decade take a European perspective and mention the cultural and intellectual impulses that emanated from Bohemian Jews.

In the foreword of a handout on the Holocaust for Czech schools, the authors behind this guide wrote that the “final solution of the Jewish Question” was one of the subjects that had disappeared from the curriculum in Czech schools.¹ The reason, they said, was apparently the “struggle against Zionism”, which had been an ideological reaction to domestic developments within the State of Israel and its support for the West in the Cold War. Official Zionism, they added, was accompanied by latent anti-semitic tendencies. The result was a mistrust of everything having to do with the history of Judaism, including the history of the Holocaust.

Such phrases in the foreword of a teachers’ handout – one that also discussed the way Czechs deal with Jews and Jewish history – was unusual even a decade after the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe.² Although history textbooks published after 1989 differ fundamentally from their predecessors, the depiction of Jews

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¹ *Téma: Holocaust. Informační materiál pro učitelé k výuce na základních školách a středních školách*, Aut. col. Vojtěch Blodig (Prague 2000), p. 5.

² Petr Brod, “Die Juden in der Nachkriegs-tschechoslowakei”, in Jörg K. Hoensch, Stanislav Biman, Lubomir Lipták, eds., *Judenemanzipation – Antisemitismus – Verfolgung in Deutschland, Österreich-Ungarn, den Böhmisches Ländern und in der Slowakei* (Essen 1999), pp. 211–228; Jana Svobodá, “Erscheinungsformen des Antisemitismus in den Böhmisches Ländern 1948–1992”, in *ibid.*, pp. 229–248; Helena Krejčová, “Jüdische Erwartungen und Enttäuschungen nach dem Jahre 1945”, in *Češi a němci – ztracené dějiny* (Prague 1995), pp. 245–253.

remains tainted by Communist anti-Zionism, which was often accompanied by antisemitism. One need only recall the interpretation of the term “Zionism” as a particularly reactionary, nationalist concept, the anti-Zionism campaigns of the 1950s and 1970s, and especially the silence regarding the Nazi genocide against the Jews. All of this has left traces on Czech attitudes towards Jewish topics right up to the present.³

When it comes to depictions of the Jews – and to depictions of the Roma – the Czech history books published after 1989 can be divided into the following groups regardless of the type of school and grade level: those books that omit the Jews completely; those that make an extremely brief reference to Jews, perhaps a single sentence; those that broach the subject in greater detail (several sentences); and those that dedicate specific sections to describing the history of the Jews in different periods. The books are divided in content between those that portray the Jews solely as victimised and oppressed, and those that show them as a segment of the greater population with their own religious and cultural traditions and as a force that shaped society. A further aspect considered is the depiction of the State of Israel.

Jewish History as a Blank Space

Until 1995, the history of the Jews – like that of the Roma – was either left out of Czech schoolbooks,⁴ or mentioned only very briefly.⁵ As late as 1997, Miroslav Kárný rightly criticised the lack of schoolbooks and teachers’ guides on the Jewish history.⁶ There were few depictions of Jews that could have at least generated inquiries from pupils.⁷

³ Svobodová, “Erscheinungsformen”, p. 246–248; Brod, “Die Juden”, p. 211ff.

⁴ *Dějiny Čech a Moravy slovem a dokumenty. 1. část: Od počátku do roku 1471. Učební text pro základní a střední školy*, naps. Julius Janovský (Prague 1993); *Dějiny Čech a Moravy slovem a dokumenty. 2. část: Od roku 1471 do roku 1914*, naps. Julius Janovský (Prague 1993); *Za Československou republiku 1914–1918. Historický Ústav ČSAV na pomoc škole*, naps. Ivan Šedivý (Prague 1993); *Vybrané prameny k dějinám státu a práva v Českých zemích a na Slovensku II. Prozatímní učební pomůcka*, Karolina Adamová (Plzeň 1994); *Dějiny středověku a raného novověku. I. dílo. Učebnice pro základní školy*, Dana Picková, Naděžda Kubů (Prague 1995); *Dějepis. Nová doba. Československo a svět 1945–1989. 4. dílo. Učebnice pro základní školy*, Jiří Jozák (Prague 1995); *Dějepis. Nová doba. Československo a svět 1918–1938, Učebnice pro základní školy*, Pavla Vošahlíková (Prague 1996).

⁵ *Dějepis. Experimentální učebnice pro šestý ročník základní školy, III. Díl*, Aut. col. Miroslav Hroch (Prague 1990); *Historie v nepokřiveném zrcadle. Na cestě k národní svěbytnosti a státní samostatnosti. České země v letech 1867–1918. Pro žáky 7.–9. ročníků základních škol*, Vladislav Šťastný (Prague 1991); *Historie v nepokřiveném zrcadle. Druhá světová válka 1939–1945*, Miroslav Teichmann (Prague 1991); *Historie v nepokřiveném zrcadle. Čas normalizace. Československo v letech 1968–1989*, Vlastimil Ježek, Klement Lukeš, Petr Prokůš (Prague 1992); *Historie v nepokřiveném zrcadle. Pad komunismu. Rok 1989 ve východní Evropě*, Vlastimil Ježek, Klement Lukeš (Prague 1992).

⁶ Miroslav Kárný, “Der Holocaust und die Juden in Böhmen und Mähren”, in Robert Maier, ed., *Tschechen, Deutsche und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Von der Schwere geschichtlicher Erfahrung und der Schwierigkeit ihrer Aufarbeitung* (Hannover 1997), pp. 39–56.

⁷ Besides the schoolbooks covered here, special educational publications on Jewish history did appear early on, and were used to fill the gap and introduce viewpoints which did not appear in textbooks till the end of the 1990s; Vladimír Sadek, Anita Franková, Jiřina Šedinová, *Židovské dějiny, kultura a náboženství* (Prague 1992); Maria Bezchlebová, Anita Franklová, Eva Štichlová, eds., *Cesta – cíl neznámý* (Prague 1995); *Holocaust – svědomí lidstva*.

For example, the fourth edition of *Dějepis. Středověk pro základní školy* [History. The Middle Ages for middle schools⁸], which appeared in 1994, divides the population of various countries by place of residence, way of life, and religious denomination, etc. The book includes Catholic Christians, non-Catholic Christians, Muslims, avowed Buddhists, but not Jews. Thus, the Jewish faith appears not to belong to the religions of Europe and Asia.⁹

Several textbooks from this period made at least some mention Jews, albeit exclusively as victims and objects of persecution. The racially motivated persecution of the Jews by the Nazis was given scant attention, and sometimes, the coverage given the persecution of the Jews was significantly less than that given to other persecuted groups.¹⁰

If Jews were discussed in other contexts, then in short sentences or half sentences, for example, the presence of Jews at the time of the Crusades and Soběslav I, the existence of a Synagogue,¹¹ or Judaism as one of three civilizations that came into contact with each other during the Crusades.¹²

Miroslav Hoch's *Dějiny novověku. 1850–1993* [History of the modern age], which was published in 1994, discussed Czech political history in an international context, unlike numerous other works, and presented antisemitic prejudices via the Dreyfus Affair. Together with a collection of sources on “the project for an autonomous Jewish state” – no additional details are provided – this information is hardly enough for the pupil to form even a basic picture of Jewish history.¹³ Reasons for behaviour are not provided, and the term “racial prejudice” is not explained.

České a Československé dějiny [Czech and Czechoslovak history], a two-volume work from 1991 by a group of authors headed by Jaroslav Marek, mentions Jews four times.¹⁴ The first reference comes at the end of the 14th century. The “attacks on Jews” – the burning down of the Jewish quarter and the murder of several thousand Jews in Prague in 1389 – are mentioned in the context of the social and economic

Sborníček z literární soutěže žáků základních a středních škol, Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy České republiky (Prague 2000); *Téma: Holocaust. Informační materiál pro učitele k vyuce na základních školách a středních školách*, Aut. Kol., Vojtěch Blodi (Prague 2000).

⁸ “Middle School” here means the second stage of the Czech “základní škola” (literally: primary school), which includes years five to nine and like preparatory school (grades five to twelve) makes up the second school type in the two-track Czech school system.

⁹ *Dějepis. Středověk pro základní školy. 3. díl*, naps. Miroslav Hroch, Helena Mandelová, Josef Petrůň (Prague 1994).

¹⁰ *Dějiny Československé republiky slovem a dokumenty. Od roku 1918 do roku 1992. Učební text pro základní školy a pro střední školy*, Julius Janovský (Prague 1994), pp. 35, 40; *Dějepis. Nová doba. Druhá světová válka a československý odboj. 3. díl* (Prague 1993), pp. 15, 30–31; *Dějepis. Rukověť českých a slovenských dějin od pravěku do roku 1989*, Jaroslav Jung (n.p. 1995), p. 56; *Dějepis. Univerzální příručka pro maturanty a ucházce o studium na vysokých školách*, sest. Jaroslav Jung (Prague 1992), p. 92.

¹¹ *Toulky českou minulostí. I. Díl. Kniha je doporučena ministerstvem Školství ČR jako četba k vyuce dějepisu na ZS a SŠ*, Petr Hora-Hořejš (Prague 1995), p. 236.

¹² *Historie. I. Středověk. Učebnice dějepisu pro základní školy a víceletá Gymnázia*, naps. Vratislav Vaníček, Věra Hrochová, Zdeněk Smetánka (Prague 1995), p. 95.

¹³ *Dějiny novověku. 1850–1993. Učebnice pro střední školy*, Miroslav Hroch (Prague 1994), pp. 127, 150.

¹⁴ *České a Československé dějiny. I. Od počátku do roku 1790*, Aut. col. Jaroslav Marek (Prague 1991); *České a Československé dějiny. II. Od roku 1790 do současnosti*, Aut. col. Jaroslav Marek (Prague 1991).

crises at that time. In a few sentences, it is said that non-Christian inhabitants had lived in the country for a long time as “a tolerated group”, and that they had been pushed to the periphery of society. For these reasons, the Jews had preserved a high level of learning and an independent culture. Prague was one of the most significant centres of Judaism in Europe. One of the few professions the Jews were allowed to practise was money lending “at high interest (usury)”: “For this reason, they were unpopular among the people.”

This depiction is an ambivalent one. On one hand, the existence of Jews in Bohemia in the Middle Ages is mentioned – which is not the case in most textbooks published before 1995 – as is their marginalisation and their limited career options. On the other hand, the choice of words (usury) fulfils the cliché and offers a putative explanation for their rejection by the non-Jewish population.

The series *Historie v nepokřiveném zrcadle* [History in an unbiased mirror] appeared shortly after the collapse of Communism and was also written by an authors’ collective. The series, for grades 7–9, consisted of individual smaller volumes of 27–43 pages. The presentation of Jewish history is accordingly succinct. Above all, the contexts in which Jews are ignored are striking. For example, the chapter “The Consequences of the Second World War” lists the victims of each country.¹⁵ There is no reference to the Jewish victims. The authors could of course argue that the Jews counted as part of the population of each country.

By contrast, the two instalments of this series written by Zdeněk Sládek stand out in the positive sense of the word. The volume dedicated to the First Republic of Czechoslovakia is one of the first schoolbooks to include the Jewish population among the various national and ethnic groups.¹⁶ The treatment of postwar history includes the new settlement of previously German-populated areas, settlers from Slovakia, repatriation from abroad, but also the return of Jews from concentration camps. However, pupils are only given the figures for the Jewish population before and after the war without any additional information.¹⁷ Even more remarkable are the explanations of the political trials in the early 1950s, whose antisemitic and anti-Zionist background is by no means always described in schoolbooks. For example, pupils learn the following about the Slánský Trial:

Moreover, the trial also had an anti-Semitic background – 11 of the 14 defendants were Jews. At the hearings, anti-Jewish insults were heard with all their might – directly from the mouths of court officials. The eleven death penalties are adequate expression of this court’s character.¹⁸

Because there is no further information on Jewish history or the history of antisemitism in the rest of this series, pupils will not be able to make sense of this text without additional guidance and information.

¹⁵ *Historie v nepokřiveném zrcadle. Druhá světová válka 1939–1945*, p. 12.

¹⁶ *Historie v nepokřiveném zrcadle. Demokratická republika. Československo v letech 1918–1939*, Zdeněk Sládek (Prague 1991), p. 9.

¹⁷ *Historie v nepokřiveném zrcadle. Od demokracie do totalitě. Československo v letech 1945–1968*, Zdeněk Sládek (Prague 1991), p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

The Discovery of the Jews as Victims

Several schoolbooks published in 1995 address Jewish aspects of history in greater detail. This trend increased in 1997. The first volume of the *Dějiny Českých zemí* [History of the Bohemian lands] describes Jews in various contexts and devotes a relatively large amount of space to the “Golden Age of the Culture of the Prague Jews”.¹⁹ However, the focus of course remains on Nazi persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the foundation and development of the State of Israel is also covered here. The middle school textbook *Dějiny nové doby 1850–1993* [History of the modern age 1850–1993] gives a rather detailed account of the exclusion of the Czech Jews from economic, cultural, and social life right up to their deportation and subsequent murder in concentration camps.²⁰ In addition to a short description of the creation of the ghetto Terezín (Theresienstadt) and its functions, pupils are provided with references to the camps in Poland, Auschwitz, and the number of victims. Another section on the “extermination of the Jewish population” highlights the differences specific to the persecution of the Jews in Slovakia.²¹

The three-volume *Dějiny moderní doby* [History of the modern period] (1997) was written for preparatory schools and the corresponding middle school grades. It covers the period 1870–1991. The history of the Jews is featured several times in each volume. The first volume, edited by Milan Hlavačka,²² introduces the terms “emancipation”, “antisemitic”, “Zionism”, and “pogrom”. The passage may be short, but compared with the textbooks examined so far, it is quite detailed.²³

Pupils learn that the Jewish population, like women, gradually sought to acquire equal rights (emancipation). The content and timing of the women’s emancipation movement is compared with that of Jewish emancipation, with the differences in discrimination faced by the two groups being swept aside. The text goes on to say that the success of the Jews in economic and social spheres was accompanied by anti-Jewish (antisemitic) sentiments and episodes across Europe. The Dreyfus Affair is then given as an example. In particular, Jewish disappointment in the state of affairs in Eastern Europe, where there were repeated outbursts of violence by Christians against Jews (pogroms), led to the creation of Zionism, in other words, the Jewish “nationalist” movement. The term “nationalist” (nacionalistické) is not explained in this context and awakens associations with 1970s Communist ideology that used the term to denounce the policies of the State of Israel. In the two sentences that follow present Theodor Herzl as the founder of Zionism as well as the realisation of the Jewish state with the consent of the British. This condensed history of the Jews is augmented elsewhere by a reference to Sigmund Freud’s Jewish ancestry.²⁴

¹⁹ *Dějiny Českých zemí. I. Od pravěku do poloviny 18. Století. Učebnice pro střední školy*, Josef Harna, Rudolf Fišer (Prague 1995), pp. 72, 96, 235–236.

²⁰ *Dějiny nové doby. 1850–1993. Učebnice dějepisu pro základní školy*, Věra Olivová (Prague 1995), pp. 125, 139, 147.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147.

²² *Dějiny moderní doby. 1. díl 1870–1918. Dějepis pro druhý stupeň základní školy a pro odpovídající ročníky víceletých gymnázií. Učebnice zpracovaná podle osnov vzdělávacího programu základní škola*, zprac. Milan Hlavačka (Prague 1997).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

The second volume in the series, written by Drahomír Jančík and also published in 1997, brings up Jewish history several times during the period 1918–1945. The focus, as can be expected, is on Nazi persecution and the foundation of the State of Israel. A few minor cultural achievements are also mentioned. The book is a little more detailed than others in its coverage of Nazi racial ideology as it affected Jews and Slavs as well as the persecution of the Jews, the anti-Jewish boycotts, the Nuremberg Laws, Aryanisation, and the Night of Broken Glass.²⁵ The “Tragedy of the Holocaust” is given a half page.²⁶ This discussion is introduced by picking up again on the theme of Nazi racial ideology, which also denied the Roma a right to life and led to the deaths of a quarter of a million Roma in concentration camps during the war.

The terms “holocaust” and “ghetto” are then introduced as are the population figures for Europe. There then follows a relatively detailed depiction of the policy of annihilation, including the role of the SS in the occupied territories, the Wannsee Conference, and a list of the extermination camps in Poland. There is also an allusion to antisemitic attitudes in other countries that contributed to the destruction of the Jews. Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, and Vichy France are named explicitly. As positive examples of solidarity between peoples, Italy, Bulgaria, and Denmark are mentioned.

Nazi persecution is also raised in connection with the establishment of the Reich Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, where information is limited to the extension of the Nuremberg Laws to the 118,300 Jews living there, the founding of the Terezín ghetto (Theresienstadt), and the extermination camps in Poland.²⁷ The pupil learns nothing about the attitude of non-Jewish Bohemians and Moravians towards the persecution of the Jews.

Alongside these descriptions, the textbook also devotes three-quarters of a page to the start of the “Arab-Jewish Conflict in Palestine”.²⁸ Beginning with the awakening of the Zionist movement, Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe and the British administration of the region after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, this book traces the causes of the conflict back to the Jewish purchase of Arab land for the construction of settlements after First World War. Arab leaseholders (fellahs) had to leave their land, it is said, and so lost their means of subsistence. This was one of the reasons for the tensions between Arabs and Jews.

The Discovery of the Jewish Cultural Heritage

Since 2000, more textbooks have appeared, especially more volumes in the series *Dějepis* [History] for middle school and the corresponding grades in preparatory schools. The 2002 volume edited by Jan Kuklík and Jiří Kocian, which is for grade 9 in the middle schools and grade 4 of the eight-year preparatory schools, covers developments from the end of the First World War in 1918 to the Velvet Revolution in 1989.²⁹ The political and economic history of the First Czechoslovak Republic is presented in an international setting and runs for 36 pages. It ends with a section

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁹ *Dějepis. Nejnovější dějiny. Pro 9. ročník základní školy a 4. ročník osmiletého gymnázia*, Jan Kuklík, Jiří Kocian (Prague 2002).

called “Culture and Economics in the First Republic”. There the reader encounters the Jewish contribution in a presentation dedicated to Franz Kafka as “a representative of German-language literature written by Prague Jews, which arose through the mutual influences of the Czech environment and Czech literature”.³⁰ Kafka is listed alongside Karel Čapek and Jaroslav Hašek as one of three world-famous Czech authors. The novels and short stories by Kafka are among “the most significant works in modern literature. We should be proud that they were written in Prague.” Other German-language Jewish authors, such as Max Brod, Egon Erwin Kisch, and Leo Perutz, are referred to by name, as are Czech-language authors of Jewish origin, such as Vojtěch Rakous, Karel Poláček, and Jiří Orten as well as Jiří and František Langer.

This textbook is the first to take a new approach to Jewish culture in Czech society and is a milestone in Czech schoolbook production. This achievement is also illustrated in its descriptions of Jewish economic losses due to Aryanisation, the difficulties encountered in trying to leave the country, the social situation and the persecution of Jews,³¹ resistance efforts by Jewish inmates,³² the Nazi genocide against the Jews,³³ and developments specific to Slovakia.³⁴

The chapter “Europe and the World after 1945” also offers a significantly broader perspective.³⁵ In the sub-section “The Fate of the National Minorities in Czechoslovakia”, not only are separate figures given for the genocide directed at the Jews and Roma in connection with the expulsion of the Germans, the situation and social conditions for Jews in post-war Czechoslovakia are described.

The book also addresses the difficulties surviving Jews encountered in reintegrating into Czech and Slovak society after the Holocaust.³⁶ Pupils learn that many of the Jews who had been imprisoned in concentration camps and had German nationality were treated as Germans upon their return. Several Jews subsequently left Czechoslovakia in the “normal” expulsion transports (quotation marks in the original Czech!) during the first phase of the expulsion of the Germans.

This textbook is clearly determined to give a differentiated picture and offers information on several public “anti-Jewish – antisemitic” attitudes during restitution efforts involving property that had been owned by people of “Jewish ancestry” and seized by the Germans during the occupation. This included a range of small businesses, shops, houses, and apartments that had been turned over to Czechs and Slovaks. When returning Jews asked that this property be given back, there were complications. This section ends somewhat abruptly with figures on the size of the Jewish population in Czechoslovakia in 1947.

Using clear words in bold type, the authors explain the connection between the situation of the Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia and the “influence of the relations of the USSR and other people’s democracies with Israel”. The original position of Czechoslovakia is then explained: In May 1948, Czechoslovakia was one of the first countries to recognise Israel and establish diplomatic relations. Immediately after the war, the book continues, the Czech government facilitated the emigration of Jews to Israel.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 36–40.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 57–58.

³² Ibid., p. 62.

³³ Ibid., p. 79.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 80–105.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 96–97.

This policy was pursued until spring 1949. Czech military assistance for Israel (sales of weapons, training by military specialists) was particularly significant at the time. Unfortunately, the hopes for long-term, friendly relations did not last.

Czech foreign policy then turned its back on Israel. The reasons given in this textbook are Czechoslovakia's integration into the bloc system and Soviet interests in the Middle East. As a part of the Soviet Bloc, "the Czechs slavishly followed the course set by Soviet foreign policy in this respect". Stating that "this swing towards enmity in Czech-Israeli relations reached its zenith in 1952–1953 in a campaign against Zionism and an antisemitic (anti-Jewish) wave of behaviour linked with it", the text establishes the context of the political trials of the early 1950s.³⁷ Accordingly, the Jews are shown in a later chapter as the first victims of the political purges. The Slánský Trial and the "clearly antisemitic background to the trial" are also discussed.³⁸

This textbook stands out significantly from previous publications. For the first time, Jewish history is covered systematically, and the cultural legacy is given consideration. The history of the Jews does not end with the Holocaust, and Czech history is subjected to critical scrutiny.

Likewise, Zdeněk Beneš and Josef Petraň offer new approaches in *České dějiny* [Czech history], which was first published in 1997, with a second edition following in 2001. The authors stress in their introduction that this textbook picks up on the conceptions of a four-part edition of general history published in 1994–1995, but that its methodology is different.³⁹ Within the chronological narration, the authors follow a structural interpretation of history, in order to better explain historical processes.⁴⁰ The history of the country, they write, should not be tied to the country's borders. One needs a Central European or, when necessary, a European perspective to understand the historical changes in social consciousness, Czech identity, and cultural relations.

The authors weave the history of the Jews into several sub-sections of each of the textbook's ten main chapters. The Jews are mentioned as tradesmen in the period 999–1198⁴¹ and in a later chapter on the Bohemian monarchy as part of the urban population alongside the Czechs and Germans.⁴² The same chapter includes a detailed description of Jews in the 13th century, the closed Jewish communities, the restrictions on Jews, the ghettos, and religious ties. The perspective is widened from a Bohemian to a European one. To explain the hatred of the Jews, this textbook, like older ones, invokes their economic success and their importance to whoever was in power at that time. The privileges that Přemysl II Otakar bestowed on the Jews in 1254 are mentioned – including the ambivalent consequences – and supplemented with an excerpt from source material. Students learn that this statute was the prototype for similar privileges and was "not coincidentally" called the Magna Carta of Jewish liberty, even though his son Wenzel II repealed it without the slightest scruple. The reader also encounters the history of the Jews in subsequent chapters: the riots against this population group, the scapegoat role ascribed to them during the plague of

³⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

³⁹ *České dějiny I. Učebnice pro střední školy*, Zdeněk Beneš, Josef Petraň. Prague 1997 (1st edition), 2001 (2nd edition).

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 81.

⁴² Ibid., p. 99.

1389,⁴³ the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, persecution in Germany, migration to Central Europe, and especially the economic and cultural significance of the Jewish community in Prague.⁴⁴ All this impresses upon the reader that the history of the Jews is an integral part of Bohemian and European history.

A special section is devoted to Jewish culture and its “high level in the second half of the 16th century”.⁴⁵ Here, too, the Prague Jewish community, its scholars, and personalities are given greater scope than in the aforementioned textbooks. This textbook offers readers the opportunity to follow the history of the Jews in the Bohemian lands and Europe and trace the development of their social and cultural role over the centuries. Additional extracts from historical sources invite readers to reinforce and contemplate what they learn. Students get to know Jews as part of European history and not just as victims of Nazi racial ideology.

The second volume of *České dějiny*, edited by Robert Kvaček and released in 2002, retains the construction and methods of the first volume but differs markedly in style.⁴⁶ The persecution of the Jews is presented in detail in the chapter on the Second World War. What is new here is the detailed description of Czech attitudes towards the Jews at this time. According to the book, parts of the population welcomed the disappearance of the Jews as competitors, but many Czechs showed genuine compassion, and some helped Jews. The book alludes to the list of the victims in Prague’s Pinkas Synagogue and recommends that readers at least occasionally spend some time in front of it. The text ends with the words: “They belonged to us, to this country.”⁴⁷

Summary

Since 1989, the depiction of Jews in textbooks and teacher handouts on Czech history has reflected the political and social changes within the Czech Republic. Whereas the history of Bohemian Jews was hardly raised as a subject before 1989, Jewish topics gradually made their way into the country’s history books, especially after 1995. The negative image of the State of Israel propagated under Communism was also revised. The revision of history requires time. In the first few years after the Velvet Revolution, the majority of textbooks continued to ignore Jewish history. Exceptions proved the rule. Only from 1995 onwards were Jewish topics given more space in history books. The focus at this time was on Jews as victims, especially of the Nazis. Some of the textbooks from this period lack a concept and are content to provide information without context. They fail to show that the Jews contributed to Czech history in all periods. However, some of the textbooks that have appeared in the last decade mention the cultural and intellectual impulses that emanated from Bohemian Jews. The depiction of the State of Israel has also changed. Zionism is no longer denounced as “nationalist”, but classified as one of many national movements. Finally, even the way textbooks handle Jewish history has become a topic, and pupils have been given the chance to reflect on different versions of history.

Translated by Mark Belcher, Berlin

⁴³ Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 168ff.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 177.

⁴⁶ *České dějiny II. Učebnice pro střední školy*, Robert Kvaček (Prague 2002).

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

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