

Czech Holocaust or Holocaust in the Czech Lands?

Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2006), 447 pp.

Reviewed by
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Founded after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, Czechoslovakia was forcibly dismembered by the Nazis in 1938–1939. Initially comprising the historic Czech Lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and part of Silesia), as well as Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Rus, Czechoslovakia ceded its western borderlands (the so-called Sudetenland) to Nazi Germany as a condition of the Munich Agreement (September 29, 1938). In turn, rump Czechoslovakia was reconstituted as the Second Czecho-Slovak Republic — which was often hyphenated in order to reflect the emergence, on October 5, 1938, of an autonomous Slovak government within the framework of a federated republic.

Under the terms of the First Vienna Award (November 2, 1938), Czecho-Slovakia was forced to cede southern Slovakia and parts of Sub-Carpathian Rus to Hungary, as well as a sliver of Silesia to Poland, further reducing the country's size. The *coup de grâce* came on March 15, 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded the remaining territory of Bohemia and Moravia and incorporated it into the Third Reich as a protectorate to be administered by a German *Reichsprotektor*. Slovakia, minus the ceded territories, became a semi-independent Nazi puppet state under President Jozef Tiso. Czecho-Slovakia ceased to exist.

Livia Rothkirchen, the noted historian of Czechoslovak Jewry and the Holocaust, personally experienced the dismemberment of her native country. She has devoted much of the last half-century to documenting and examining the horrors of the Holocaust, which she herself managed to survive. Almost forty-five years after the publication of

her groundbreaking work on the Holocaust in Slovakia,¹ Rothkirchen has published a new study of the Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia, the first comprehensive work in English devoted to this topic. Taken together, these two works provide an overarching history of the Holocaust in the former Czechoslovakia, drawing on a wide variety of published and unpublished sources.

The sources for these two works differ tremendously, since her book on the Holocaust in Slovakia, which was published in the period of Stalinism, made little use of archival sources in Czechoslovakia. For her current work, which was published sixteen years after the Velvet Revolution, Rothkirchen made use of archival holdings in the Czech Republic, as well as the many studies on the Holocaust that have appeared in *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumenten/Terezínské studie a dokumenty* and elsewhere since the fall of Communism. She draws on archival material from Czech, German, British, American, Swiss, and Israeli archives, as well as a wide range of reminiscences, diaries, survivors' testimonies, and some remarkable private letters that were smuggled out of Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II.

Rothkirchen's new book is part of the *Comprehensive History of the Holocaust* series, a fifteen-to-twenty-volume series to be published by the University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, which aims to examine the Holocaust "on a country-by-country basis."² In light of the inherently trans-national character of the Holocaust, and in light of the specific chain of events in Czechoslovakia in 1938–1939, this constitutes a particularly hefty challenge in the case of Bohemia and Moravia. To begin with, should such a work focus on *the territory of Bohemia and Moravia* and the events that unfolded there, or should it focus on *the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia* and their diverse fates in the course of the Holocaust? Are the stateless Polish Jewish refugees who were deported from Ostrava in the Nisko transports of 1939–1940 part of the Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia? What about the hundreds of Czechoslovak Jews who were deported to death camps from France? What about the more than 60,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, Holland, Denmark, Luxembourg, France, Hungary, and Poland who were deported to Theresienstadt, or the tens of thousands of Jews for whom

1 Livia Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of Slovak Jewry* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1961).

2 See www.nebraskapress.unl.edu

Theresienstadt served as a way station on their way to Riga, Izbica, Piaski, Rejowiec, Lublin, Warsaw, Zamość, Sobibor, Ujazdów, Trawniki, Maly Trostinec, Baranovici, Raasiku, Treblinka, and Auschwitz?³ In the spirit of the *Comprehensive History of the Holocaust* series, Rothkirchen's book tends to treat the topic *territorially*, focusing on the events transpiring in Bohemia and Moravia (and occasionally in England and Palestine) rather than the fate of Bohemian and Moravian Jews — however they were defined — who were deported to Łódź or Minsk, or who found temporary refuge in the Soviet Union.

The book in question deals primarily with the Holocaust, but as the title itself suggests, Rothkirchen seeks to understand the atrocities of the 1930s and 1940s against the backdrop of the centuries-old history of “the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia.” Rothkirchen appreciates the diversity of the Jewish population in the historic Czech Lands, noting that the “devout Jewry” of centuries past had split into a number of factions by the beginning of the twentieth century. These included German Jews, Czech Jews, national or Zionist-oriented Jews, agnostics, and “Jews by origin.” Nonetheless, two categories of “Jews” are noticeably absent from her schema; namely, those who converted to Christianity, and those who married into “Aryan” families. To be sure, Rothkirchen briefly mentions the so-called “B-Juden”; i.e., non-practicing Jews or converts to Christianity (p. 116), and even alludes to the “spectrum of denominations of the Christian faith” that could be found in Theresienstadt (p. 281). She also mentions special labor camps set up in the Protectorate for the “Aryan” spouses of Jews (p. 133), but these groups all remain peripheral in her examination of the Holocaust.

In light of the high conversion and intermarriage rates in interwar Czechoslovakia, the large number of *arisch versippte Juden* (“Jews related to Aryans”) and *Mischlinge* of varying degrees is certainly not surprising. As Rudolf M. Wlaschek has documented, 40 percent of the 15,550 Jews who were registered in the Protectorate at the end of 1942 were in mixed marriages, and eight *Sonderlager* (“special camps”) had been set up in the Protectorate and the Sudetenland by the beginning

3 Miroslav Kárný, ed., *Terezínská pamětní kniha. Židovské oběti nacistických deportací z Čech a Moravy 1941–1945*, 2 vols. (Prague: Nadace Terezínská iniciativa, 1995). These questions are also important in determining the number of Holocaust victims from Bohemia and Moravia. See Pavel Škorpiš, “Jüdische Opfer Nazi-Deutschlands aus den Böhmisches Ländern 1938–1945: Versuch einer Bilanz,” *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* (1994), pp. 152–165.

of 1944, for *arisch versippte Juden* and Jewish *Mischlinge*.⁴ These individuals, who were persecuted as Jews, are an important component of the Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia.

Chapter 1 (“The Historical Setting”) provides a broad, schematic history of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia from the tenth century until the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. The chapter spans nearly a millennium, but the real focus is on the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia faced an identity crisis brought on by the pangs of modernity, the ubiquitous Czech-German conflict, and the concomitant rise of racial and economic antisemitism. Drawing on secondary literature, Rothkirchen examines the Czech-Jewish movement, which hoped to reverse the Germanization of Bohemia and Moravia’s Jews, as well as the Zionist movement, which sought to remove the Jews from the Czech-German conflict by promoting a separate Jewish nationality.

Chapter 2 (“Years of Challenge and Growth: The Jewish Minority in Czechoslovakia [1918–1938]”) details the rapid integration of Jews into the cultural, economic, and political life of the young democracy, but also looks at the growing popularity of Jewish nationalism — not only among Jews, but also among political leaders such as President T.G. Masaryk. Masaryk’s well-known support for Zionism (and Jewish national minority status) is usually understood against the backdrop of the nationality conflict in inter-war Czechoslovakia. Indeed, the promotion of a Jewish nationality could reduce the number of Jews who identified themselves as German (in Bohemia and Moravia) or Hungarian (in Slovakia) and thereby weaken the position of these potentially irredentist national minorities. In the end, German irredentism grew stronger following the Nazi rise to power in 1933, and Konrad Henlein’s Sudeten German Party helped set the stage for Munich. The Nazi rise to power also brought about an influx of Jewish refugees from Germany (and later, Austria).

Chapter 3 (“The Aftermath of Munich: The Crisis of the Intellectuals”) examines the events leading up to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938–1939, and the grave consequences for the Jews, many of whom had recently fled from Germany and Austria

4 Rudolf M. Wlaschek, *Juden in Böhmen: Beiträge zur Geschichte des europäischen Judentums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1990), pp. 193–203.

and now found themselves looking for a new refuge. In describing the climate before and after Munich, Rothkirchen draws on a fascinating set of articles written by Milena Jesenská, a Czech intellectual and political journalist, who is best known today as a friend of Franz Kafka. Jesenská, who was honored posthumously by Yad Vashem as a “Righteous Among the Nations,” wrote for the liberal-democratic weekly *Přítomnost* (“Present”), in which she described the antisemitism in the Sudetenland prior to Munich and the unenviable plight of the Jewish, Czech, and anti-Nazi Sudeten refugees who fled to Czecho-Slovakia after Munich. These refugees included 17,000 Jews from the Sudetenland, plus many thousands more who had previously fled from Germany and Austria. The Czecho-Slovak government did not look favorably upon these refugees and even issued a number of decrees restricting their commercial and occupational opportunities. Relief organizations were often overwhelmed by the situation.

In 1938–1939, roughly 27,000 Jews managed to leave Bohemia and Moravia, including 2,500 who emigrated to Palestine under the terms of the “Czech transfer” agreement signed between the Czecho-Slovak government and the Jewish Agency in Palestine. Additional Jews found refuge in Great Britain, France, the United States, and South and Central America.

Chapter 4 (“Under German Occupation [1939–45]”) examines Jewish policy under the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, focusing on the anti-Jewish measures under both *Reichsprotektor* Konstantin von Neurath (1938–1939) and his notorious successor, Reinhard Heydrich (1939–1942). The chapter goes on to examine the activities of the Jewish Religious Congregation (JRC) in Prague and its successor organization, the Jewish Council in Prague. Both of these bodies were subordinated to Eichmann’s *Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung* (Central Office for Jewish Emigration), which in turn reported to the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office, RSHA) in Berlin.

For the German and Sudeten Jews who had found refuge in Czecho-Slovakia, the German occupation brought an abrupt end to this brief respite. Jewish relief organizations were immediately disbanded, and many Jews were arrested during *Aktion Gitter* (“Operation Bars”), which also targeted German émigrés, politicians from the former regime, and other public figures. The roundups, Rothkirchen notes, were carried out by the Czech gendarmerie on behalf of the German occupiers.

Czech gendarmes, Czech fascists, and ordinary Czech citizens were complicit in the anti-Jewish activities during this period – from public humiliations and arbitrary arrests to synagogue burnings and violent demonstrations. Rothkirchen duly describes these portentous acts, yet observes somewhat incongruously that “Jews suffered particularly harsh treatment in localities with large German populations” (p. 102). This reflects a tendency on her part to attribute Czech antisemitism more to “opportunism” and the outside influence of “Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda” than to other, domestic factors. While the Czech fascist organization “Vlajka” (“Flag”) receives brief mention, as does its “bulletin” *Arijský boj* (“Aryan Struggle”), Rothkirchen could have delved deeper into the central role they played in fomenting antisemitism and in creating the culture of denunciation that helped facilitate the Holocaust.

Benjamin Frommer’s recent monograph, *National Cleansing*, which was also published in 2005, examines *Arijský boj*’s efforts to expose Czechs who “violated anti-Semitic sanctions or who otherwise failed to demonstrate sufficient loyalty to the Third Reich.” By soliciting and publishing anonymous denunciations of Jews and “Jew-lovers” alike, *Arijský boj* made life easier for the Gestapo and heightened the risk involved in Gentiles’ acts of kindness toward Jews. Many of the Jews and “white Jews” who were denounced in the pages of the publication were subsequently rounded up by the Gestapo and deported to the East. As Frommer convincingly argues, this “Czech version of Julius Streicher’s *Der Stürmer*” provided a means for Czechs to denounce their neighbors without feeling as if they were collaborating with the German occupation authorities whom they considered illegitimate.⁵

Nazi policies in the Protectorate aimed at the gradual Germanization of society and the confiscation of Jewish property naturally played an important role in this process. According to a 1940 report cited by Rothkirchen, roughly one-third of Czechoslovakia’s industrial and banking capital was in Jewish hands. Iron works and coal mines owned by the Rothschild and Gutmann families were incorporated into Hermann Goering Werke; the Böhmisches Escompte Bank (Bohemian

5 Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 164–174.

Discount Bank), whose three Jewish directors were killed, became a key instrument in the “Aryanization” of Jewish capital holdings.

Rothkirchen stresses that non-Jewish Czechs also suffered from these confiscations. The law regarding “Jewish enterprises” (June 21, 1939), which also introduced the Nuremberg Laws to the Protectorate, was intended to encompass Czech property as well. This confiscated property was taken over largely by Germans from the Reich, thereby advancing the Germanization process. Jews and Czechs suffered together under *Reichsprotektor* Heydrich, who replaced von Neurath in September 1941. Heydrich’s new policy entailed wiping out Czech resistance and, according to Rothkirchen, launching the “Final Solution” (p. 123). Heydrich’s new policy entailed wiping out Czech resistance and launching the “Final Solution.”

Chapter 5 (“The Protectorate Government and the ‘Final Solution’”) examines the attitude of the Czech collaborationist governments toward the “Jewish question” (without really discussing the “Final Solution”). Rothkirchen focuses primarily on the former general Alois Eliáš, who served as prime minister of the Protectorate from April 1939 until his execution by the Nazis in June 1942. She argues that Eliáš “had no prejudice” toward the Jewish community (p. 142), and she characterizes his approach to anti-Jewish legislation as “first and foremost utilitarian” (p. 143). What she means by this is that Eliáš favored a religious rather than a racial definition of the Jew, since the narrower definition would protect Czech national interests by limiting the amount of Jewish property confiscated by the Germans. In addition, Rothkirchen argues that Eliáš viewed the exclusion of Jews from economic and public life primarily as a way to reduce Czech unemployment in the Protectorate. One is left with the impression that the anti-Jewish policies under Eliáš are somehow excusable, since they were motivated by a concern for the Czech national economy rather than by raw racial hatred.

For the Czechoslovak Government-in-exile and President-in-exile Edvard Beneš, in particular, the “Jewish question” was ancillary to the overriding objective of undoing the humiliation of Munich. Chapter 6 (“The Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile in London: Attitudes and Reactions to the Jewish Plight”) examines the mixed attitudes of the government-in-exile toward Jewish refugees from Czechoslovakia.

In one of the most interesting sections of the book, Rothkirchen discusses the peculiar predicament of the 6,000–7,000 Czechoslovak

Jews in British mandatory Palestine. Several months after the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak army on French soil in October 1939, the Czechoslovak consul general in Jerusalem — who remained loyal to the government-in-exile — called upon Czechoslovak citizens in Palestine to enlist. (Many of these Jews had arrived under the terms of the “Czech transfer.”) This summons was sharply criticized by representatives of the Yishuv, who had their own military and demographic concerns. While expressing deep sympathy for the common struggle against “Hitlerism,” they noted that other Jews had been excluded from the Jewish National Home in order to allow Czechoslovak Jews to enter. As a result, the Czechoslovak Jews in Palestine owed their allegiance first and foremost to their “people and to its country” (p. 165). Nevertheless, as Rothkirchen proudly notes, many of them responded to the summons and came to constitute “the nucleus of the Czechoslovak Army on French soil” (p. 168).

While Rothkirchen touts the high percentage of Jews fighting in the Czechoslovak army in France, she makes almost no mention of their participation in the First Czechoslovak Army Corps, which fought alongside the Soviet Red Army under the leadership of Ludvík Svoboda. Erich Kulka’s *Jews in Svoboda’s Army in the Soviet Union* is a rich source on this topic, but it is not cited in the text or in the bibliography.⁶

As the debate over the Czechoslovak army in France illustrates, the conflict between Czech Zionists and assimilationist “Czechs of the Mosaic persuasion” outlived the First and Second Republics. Oddly enough, so, too, did the question about Jewish national allegiances in the context of the century-old Czech-German conflict. As Rothkirchen relates, President-in-Exile Beneš was reluctant to appoint a Jewish representative (i.e., someone representing the interests of the Jewish national minority) to the *Státní rada* (State Council) in London, because he believed the majority of Czech-Jewish emigrants in England were German-speakers and therefore not to be trusted. To be sure, Beneš, who had been decried by Germans in Czechoslovakia as “a tool of the Jews” (p. 171), also feared that a Jewish representative on the State Council would give credence to their claim. (Jaro-

6 Erich Kulka, *Jews in Svoboda’s Army in the Soviet Union: Czechoslovak Jewry’s Fight Against the Nazis During World War II* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987); first published in Czech as *Židé v Československé Slobodové armádě* (Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1979).

slav Stránský, Minister of Justice of the government-in-exile, was born a Jew, but he was by no means a representative of specifically Jewish interests.)

The first “Jewish representative” was Ernst (Arnošt) Frischer, former chairman of the Jewish Party in Czechoslovakia, who was appointed a member of the State Council in November 1941, nearly a year after this body came into being. Frischer, who “assumed the burden of providing relief and rescue for those suffering under Nazi oppression” (p. 173), also tried to bring the ongoing murder of the Jews to the attention of the world. In June 1942, he drew attention to the Nazi atrocities at a press conference in London and wrote that, “[t]here is no precedent for such organized *wholesale dying* [*sic*] in all Jewish history, nor indeed in the whole history of mankind” (p. 178).

Like the Czechoslovak army in France, the Home Resistance in the Protectorate attracted large numbers of Czech Jews. Many viewed the struggle for the restoration of Czechoslovakia and the struggle against Jewish persecution as one and the same. In Chapter 7 (“Jews in the Czech Home Resistance”), Rothkirchen poses the question raised by historian Henry Michel as to whether “the action of Jews within the Resistance can properly be called Jewish resistance” (p. 189). She examines the motives of Jewish members in the Ústřední vedení odboje domácího (ÚVOD, “Central Leadership of Home Resistance”), the Petiční výbor “Věrní zůstaneme” (PVVZ, “We Remain Faithful”), and the Communist party underground and concludes that many of them were “already deeply engaged with Czech Society” (p. 188). The Home Resistance, which received orders from the London government-in-exile, was less open to Jews than the Moscow-inspired Communist party underground, but, according to Rothkirchen, Nazi propaganda exaggerated Jewish involvement in all the resistance organizations in order to delegitimize them.

Rothkirchen draws attention to symbolic forms of resistance and solidarity, particularly in the cultural sphere. She singles out the non-Jewish Czech writers who allowed their Jewish colleagues to publish pseudonymously, occasionally even lending their own names. Rothkirchen considers this assistance “possibly one of the most inspiring aspects of the dark chapter of occupation” (p. 213), asserting that it was unparalleled elsewhere in Europe.

An episode that was certainly unparalleled elsewhere in Europe was the campaign by František Zelenka, Tobias Jakobovits, Josef Polák,

and others to save the cultural heritage of Bohemian and Moravian Jewry. With the approval of the Nazis, the JRC was authorized to collect and catalogue Jewish artifacts and art treasures from the decimated Jewish communities of the Protectorate. The plan, which was hatched during the mass deportations in the spring of 1942, dovetailed with Nazi plans to build a museum of the “extinct Jewish race”; “a mausoleum for their victims,” in the words of Egon Erwin Kisch (p. 372, note 174).

The 199,000 ritual objects (Torah mantles, kiddush cups, etc.) that were gathered from the uprooted communities served as the core collection of the Central Jewish Museum, which opened its doors in August 1942. As an “act of defiance,” the museum curators chose the motto “Thou shall not kill” for an exhibition on the Jewish lifecycle. Rothkirchen poignantly notes that this was “a silent reminder that the owners of the ritual objects and artifacts on display were being bestially murdered” (p. 214). Indeed, almost everyone who worked at the museum was killed; in October 1944, several of them were sent on one of the last transports to Auschwitz.

Chapter 8 (“The ‘Righteous’ and the Brave: Compassion and Solidarity with the Persecuted”) is a continuation of the previous chapter, focusing on the efforts by Czech Gentiles to shelter and rescue Jews. As Rothkirchen notes, research on “Righteous Gentiles” in the Protectorate was largely neglected during the postwar Communist regime, and free scholarly investigation of this topic really only began after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. This chapter is an important contribution, especially the section on the *Sondergerichte*, the Special Courts that tried and executed individuals accused of hiding and helping Jews in the Protectorate.

Chapters 9 (“Gateway to Death: The Unique Character of Ghetto Terezín [Theresienstadt]”) and 10 (“The Spiritual Legacy of the Terezín Inmates”) examine the function of Theresienstadt in carrying out the “Final Solution,” focusing on the role of the Jewish Council, the complicity of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the remarkable artistic and cultural legacy of the ghetto inmates. Theresienstadt, which was established as a *Siedlungsgebiet* (settlement) and *Sammellager* (assembly camp) in the fall of 1941, assumed a third function after the Wannsee Conference in January 1942: “camouflage” for the “Final Solution.” This last function is reflected in the various names it went by during its four-year existence: *Altersghetto* (old peo-

ple's ghetto), *Prominentenghetto* (ghetto for the well-known), *Musterghetto* (model ghetto), and even *Judenstaat* (Jewish state), as Adolf Eichmann called it during the second ICRC visit on April 6, 1945 (p. 234).

In her examination of Theresienstadt, Rothkirchen emphasizes the "time coefficient" (p. 233), noting that any kind of delay increased the chances of survival for the inmates, especially as the Nazi defeat became a foregone conclusion. Consequently, she commends the members of the Jewish Council, who were "determined to do their utmost to avoid further transports 'to the East'" (p. 235). Rothkirchen's focus on the local context would have been enriched by a deeper engagement with the larger corpus of scholarship on the *Judenräte* in general — from the first salvos of Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Trunk in the 1960s, to the more recent scholarship by Dan Michman and others.⁷

Rothkirchen's examination of the ICRC amounts to a scathing indictment of the Red Cross, casting its leadership as almost willfully complicit in covering up the Holocaust. Of the more than 140,000 people who passed through Theresienstadt in 1941–1945, it could be argued that the 450 Jews deported from Denmark, in October 1943, played the most important role in bringing the ICRC to Theresienstadt. It was this deportation that triggered the Danish Red Cross, as well as King Christian X, the bishop of Copenhagen, and the chancellors of Danish universities to request the ICRC visit (p. 254). This, in turn, triggered the Nazi's duplicitous "beautification campaign," which aimed to present Theresienstadt as a "free city," where "the Jews enjoyed self-government and lived in decent conditions" (pp. 256–57).

The ICRC delegation visited Theresienstadt twice, first on June 23, 1944, then on April 6, 1945, and the Nazis pulled off, in Rothkirchen's terms, "a well-staged comedy" (p. 259). As Rabbi Leo Baeck testified after the war, "The [members of the delegation] appeared to be completely taken in by the false front put up for their benefit . . . Perhaps they knew the real conditions — but it looked as if they did not want to know the truth" (p. 259). Indeed, as Rothkirchen points out, at the time of the visit, the ICRC in Geneva possessed reliable evidence

⁷ Dan Michman, "Jewish Leadership 'in extremis,'" in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 319–340.

about the deportation of Jews from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, yet a Swiss member of the delegation dutifully reported that “whoever reaches this place [Theresienstadt] was not to be sent further” (p. 257). During the second visit — which took place more than three months after the liberation of Auschwitz — another delegation was shown the film *Heimstätte für Juden* (“Homestead for Jews”). The artists had been gassed at Auschwitz in October 1944.

One member of the ICRC delegation, Dr. Otto Lehner, summarized his visit in the following terms:

The idea of the Reich government in establishing Theresienstadt was [prompted by the desire] to create a Jewish community to be run by its self-government, which would serve as a practical experiment on a small scale, for the future Jewish state to which a certain strip of land should be allotted after the war. The miniature Jewish state in Theresienstadt rests on the principle of collective economy. There exists a kind of elite communism, which is strongly reflected in the overall structure (p. 263).

A month before V-E Day, Lehner was either hoodwinked by the sophisticated charade, or simply “did not want to know the truth.”

The charade extended to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where two transports of 5,000 Jews each arrived from Theresienstadt — one in September and one in December 1943 — to the so-called Czech “Family Camp.” Here the prisoners were allowed to keep their clothes and hair and to remain together with their families — that is, until they were no longer needed.

As Nili Keren and Otto Dov Kulka have shown, the Germans established the Family Camp in preparation for a planned visit of an ICRC delegation to Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁸ Part of a ruse intended to show that reports of mass extermination were unfounded, the Family Camp outlived its purpose when the ICRC delegation became convinced, in June 1944, that Theresienstadt was the Jews’ final destination. The Nazis liquidated the first transport in March 1944, and the second

8 Otto Dov Kulka, “Ghetto within Extermination Camp” (Hebrew), in *Nazi Concentration Camps* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1984), pp. 249–260; Nili Keren, “The Family Camp,” in Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 428–440. See also *Terezínský rodinný tábor v Osvetimi-Birkenau* (Prague: Terezínska iniciativa, 1994).

one in July 1944. Before the first transport was exterminated, the prisoners sent post-dated postcards to Theresienstadt, which arrived at the ghetto long after the writers had perished in the gas chambers.

Rothkirchen leaves out this important element of the Theresienstadt charade, making mention of the Family Camp only as evidence of the “experience of community bonding” in the ghetto (p. 280). She praises this “collective of prisoners” for forming a “new human and social entity” in the shadow of the crematoria and, especially, for engaging in educational activities in the children’s block.

Rothkirchen places tremendous importance on these acts of “spiritual resistance,” particularly the remarkable explosion of artistic, literary, theatrical, and musical creativity in Theresienstadt. Rothkirchen imbues this spiritual resistance with the same importance as armed resistance. As she notes, after the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica, in August 1944, many former officers of the Czechoslovak army were deported from Theresienstadt in order to weaken the “resistance potential” there (p. 260). In the absence of organized armed resistance, acts of spiritual resistance assume even greater importance — as does the historiographical debate over who inspired them. Challenging the conventional view that educational activities in Theresienstadt were primarily left wing, she stresses that Zionists of all stripes were also involved.

Rothkirchen observes that “culture became the elixir of life” for the inmates at Theresienstadt and devotes many pages to the noteworthy achievements in such inhuman conditions. She examines the debate over the “ethical significance and value of cultural activities” at Theresienstadt, contrasting Hans Günther Adler with Victor Ullmann.

H.G. Adler, a survivor of Theresienstadt who wrote groundbreaking works on life in the ghetto,⁹ denigrated the cultural activities in Theresienstadt as self-deception. “One benumbed oneself, denied the present and, worst of all, unsuspectingly willingly carried out the wishes of the SS,” he wrote after the war. “The intended deception of [outside] visitors became the self-deception of the prisoners” (p. 276).

Ullmann, on the other hand, expressed a very different opinion, without the benefit of hindsight. A celebrated composer, pianist,

9 H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft. Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1955); *Verheimlichte Wahrheit: Theresienstädter Dokumente* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1958).

and music critic in inter-war Prague, Ullmann composed an opera in Theresienstadt (*The Emperor of Atlantis*) and met his end in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Prior to his deportation in October 1944, he wrote the following: “[O]ur determination in the cultural sphere was commensurate with our will to live. And I am convinced that all those who, in life and in art, were fighting to force form upon resisting matter will agree with me” (p. 276).

This spirit presumably also motivated the young boys who edited *Vedem* (“In the Lead”), a secret magazine published in the ghetto.¹⁰

In the Epilogue (“Between 1945 and the Velvet Revolution of 1989”), Rothkirchen touches upon retribution, restitution, and nationalization in the immediate postwar years, the anti-Zionist trials and propaganda in the Communist period, Jewish emigration in 1968, and efforts by the surviving remnant to reestablish Jewish communal life under such adverse conditions.¹¹ Rothkirchen devotes considerable space to post-war Czechoslovakia’s “unique role” in building up the State of Israel — first as a transit point for many Holocaust survivors on their way to Palestine, and then as a source of weapons for the Israeli War of Independence.

She does not deal with the many Jews, like herself, who began new lives in Israel (or elsewhere), taking with them the legacy of Czechoslovak Jewry. The Union of Czechoslovak Emigrants in Israel and Beit Theresienstadt museum at Kibbutz Givat Chayim Ichud are just two such testaments, and they could have been worked into the epilogue. Similarly, the epilogue could have dealt with the rescue of more than 1,500 Czech Torah scrolls that had been confiscated by the Nazis during the Holocaust, brought to London in 1964, and subsequently distributed to synagogues in more than twenty countries.¹²

Any work on Bohemia and Moravia — indeed, any work on the former Habsburg Empire — must deal with the multiple town-names, reflecting the multiple languages spoken in the region. Since almost all of the localities in Bohemia and Moravia had both a Czech and Ger-

10 Marie Rút Křížková, Kurt Jiří Kotouč and Zdeněk Ornest, *We Are Children Just the Same: Vedem, the Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezín* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995).

11 For the latest scholarship on Jewish life in Communist Czechoslovakia, see Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust and Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2006).

12 Joseph C. Pick, “The Story of the Czech Scrolls,” in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984), pp. 584–610.

man name, it is important to be consistent in usage. Most readers may not be confused by the alternating use of Theresienstadt and Terezín, but few would be able to identify Moravská Ostrava (pp. 110–111) and Mährisch Ostrau (pp. 112–113) as one and the same town. The book also contains a number of recurring spelling errors, such as Łodý instead of Łodź; Litzmanstadt instead of Litzmannstadt (p. 124); Reichsicherheitsamt instead of Reichssicherheitsamt. In addition, the index is somewhat unreliable: to cite a few examples, Litzmannstadt, Banská Bystrica, and Ujazdów all appear in the book but not in the index.

The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust is an important testament to the legacy of Czechoslovak Jewry, and it is a welcome contribution to the growing body of literature on the Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia. Rothkirchen weaves much of the existing scholarship into a compelling narrative, and, in so doing, she also challenges some of the conventional views. Most importantly, she has written the first synthetic work in English on the Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia, ensuring that this will become the starting point and yardstick for any subsequent work on the topic.