

Hebrew Printing in Moravia 1753–1803

Abstract

Hebrew printing in the Czech lands, established since the beginning of the 16th century in Prague, is an unevenly researched topic. While Hebrew printing in Prague has received due attention, Hebrew printing in Moravia has been studied only partially and without a broader context. The thesis focuses comprehensively on the only long-time working Hebrew printing house in Moravia operated by members of the Neumann family and Josef Rossmann, which worked in Brno and briefly in Mikulov between 1753 and 1803.

The aim of the thesis is to present a complete bibliographical inventory and an analytical description of all 108 Moravian editions in Hebrew, Yiddish and Jüdischdeutsch (Ashkenazic German). This inventory serves as the basis for a historical-analytical study that places Moravian Hebrew book printing within its contemporary historical and social context. It will focus on the publishing of Hebrew books in Moravia, the connection of the printing press with the local Jewish community, which represented about 2% of the population at the time; it also investigates if and how contemporary social changes were reflected in the print production.

The central part of the thesis details the history of the printing house and the persons connected with it (printers, proofreaders, editors), and also examines the censorship and regulation of Hebrew book printing and book trade in Moravia. It further explores the ways of publishing and the authors who published in Moravia. Print production is then analyzed in terms of genres and languages. The thesis also includes a complete catalogue of book decor and a selective survey of typefaces with special attention to the title typefaces.

The research, focusing on individuals involved in Hebrew printing in Moravia (printer, author, publisher), presents the publishing strategies of the Moravian Hebrew printing house and their evolution over time. A detailed analysis of the production and of the publishing strategies reveals both external and internal factors that limited the activities of the printing house: these were both legislative constraints and constraints on the part of the printing house (lack of capital, small sales) and the reading public (conservative and small in number). The research also highlights how the printing shop differed from the Prague Hebrew printing and, in turn, how it might have been connected to the local Jewish community.

The thesis includes a bibliographic analytical description of 108 editions from Brno and Mikulov, which is the most complete bibliography of Moravian Hebrew book printing to date.

By offering a historically grounded, diachronic analysis, the resulting study provides a comprehensive perspective on Hebrew book printing in Moravia, placing it within the larger context of the Hebrew printing in the Habsburg monarchy. The results of this thesis may be useful to scholars in the fields of Hebraic and Judaic studies, as well as modern book and literary history, and may serve as the foundation for further social and culturally oriented research into book culture.

Key words:

Hebrew printing – Yiddish printing – Hebrew printing houses – Hebrew printers – Jewish literature – Jewish languages – Neumann, František Josef – Neumannová, Anna Františka – Neumann, Josef Karel – Rossmann, Josef – Moravia, 18th Century – Jews – Book culture – Hebrew typography – Brno – Mikulov