

Židovský náboženský život v Čechách (se zvláštním zřetelem k Praze) v období od r. 1867 do Mnichovské dohody (z pohledu představitelů českožidovského hnutí)

The Jewish religious life in Bohemia (especially in Prague) since 1867 till the Munich agreement (from the point of view of the members of the Czech-Jewish movement)

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Till the end of the 18th century the Jewish congregation was the nucleus of the traditional Jewish society and had embraced every aspect of Jewish life. Typical of the traditional Jewish society was the preservation of the group spirit. This status has started to change because of the reforms of the emperor Joseph II, especially because of the Patent of Toleration and the establishing of the Jewish normal schools. The Jewish communities since Joseph's reign had been progressively Germanized.

The process of secularization of the Jewish life in Bohemia continued during the reign of Leopold and Francis II, very important role played the Judenpatent.

After the Revolution of 1848 and the edict of freedom to move two waves of internal migration has occurred and as a result of that were the evacuation of the centuries old Jewish settlements and a creation of new large Jewish congregations. There were a number of important factors which caused the Jews to adopt the German culture at the period around 1830–1870, especially that happened in big cities as Prague.

The Jewish schools with German as the language of the instruction gave to the Jewish children an elementary knowledge of Judaism, but the knowledge was much smaller compared to the religious education of the previous generations. The role of the Jewish religious community in the life of Jews began to weaken, the position of the congregation changed, ritual aspects of Jewish life begun to reduce, religious indifference spread.

The period of German dominance in Bohemia was over and it was reflected in the Jewish assimilation as well, the Czech language begun to penetrate among the Jews. To the industrialized centers were coming Jews from agrarian areas. For some small congregations it became difficult to maintain their institutions and to pay their employees. In Prague the situation was very specific, the German society in Prague was extremely liberal and Prague Jews did not feel a need to change their German orientation of their community. The Jews of Prague lived a life of both identities – they were Germans and Jews.

However, the turn of the century was influenced by the growth of German anti-Semitism. As a reaction there appeared two new concepts, the Czech-Jewish Movement and the Zionism. The Czech-Jewish Movement as well as Zionism begun to shift away from German liberalism and both tried to change the orientation of the Jewish communities.

There was the decline in religious interest. At the turn of the century there were four elements in the Jewry: Orthodoxy, Liberalism, Zionism and the Czech-Jewish Movement. In the synagogues, the service, somewhat shortened but basically following the traditional prayer book, included at most of the synagogues choral singing, organ music, a sermon. During that period most of the Jews were no longer able to read and understand the Hebrew texts. The Burial Brotherhoods had still very high prestige and many Orthodox Jews visited the graves of famous Rabbis.

The integration of the Jews in Czech-language cities was much more difficult than in the German-language sectors. The Czech-Jewish organizations tried very hard to have religious services in Czech language. They were successful in the countryside; the Jewish institutions in Prague, at its suburbs and in German-speaking areas were much more resistant.

Inside the Czech-Jewish Movement there was a discussion about the reform. The leaders of Czech-Jewish Movement paid attention to publishing of Czech religious literature.

There was no rabbinical seminary, the students studied abroad. Many of our rabbis were foreigners, some of the rabbis came from Orthodox Galicia, and so there were many conflicts between the orthodox rabbis and the progressive Czech Jews. The religious instructions in the public schools were low. Most of the Jews wish their children to study at the school with instructions in German. The Jewish school system played a leading role in the struggle between

the Czechs and Germans. The Czech-Jewish Movement was successful and year by year more and more German-Jewish schools were closed and the children started to go to the Czech elementary schools. With the secondary schools and with the universities the Czech-Jewish Movement was not so successful. There was quite extensive discussion about the religious instructions at the beginning of the 20th century.

Because of the migration of Jews many of the religious communities disappeared and many had financial problems. Finally, on March 21, 1890, the Congregation Law no. 57 „legal status of the Israelite Religious Society“ was enacted and the budgets of the Jewish congregations were more or less secured.