Introduction

Writing in the 1940s, as the "world of yesterday" was slipping irretrievably beyond his grasp, Stefan Zweig reached into the recesses of his memory to conjure up an image of Jewish haute bourgeois society in fin-de-siècle Central Europe. Zweig was born and bred in Vienna, but like many of his Jewish and non-Jewish contemporaries, he could trace his immediate ancestry back to the "provinces" of the Habsburg monarchy. As he recalled in his memoirs:

> My father's family came from Moravia. There the Jewish communities lived in small country towns on friendly terms with the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie. They were entirely free both of the sense of inferiority and of the smooth pushing impatience of the Galician or Eastern Jews. Strong and powerful, owing to their life in the country, they went their way quietly and surely, as the peasants of their homeland strode over the fields. Early emancipated from their orthodox religion, they were passionate followers of the religion of the time, "progress," and in the political era of liberalism they supported the most esteemed representatives in parliament. When they moved from their home to Vienna, they adapted themselves to the higher cultural sphere with phenomenal rapidity, and their personal rise was organically bound up with the general rise of the times.[1]

More a bucolic flight of fancy than a historically accurate rendering of the past, Zweig's romanticized vision of Jewish life in the Moravian countryside probably says more about his own state of mind than it does about the experiences of his Moravian Jewish forebears. Nevertheless, he correctly points to the "small country towns" as the locus of Moravian Jewish life not only in his grandparents' generation but also in the preceding ones.

Neither urban nor rural, these small country towns were large enough to support the richly embroidered fabric of Jewish life yet small enough to endow the individual Jewish communities with a distinct—and sometimes idiosyncratic—character of their own. Like children in a schoolyard, many of the communities had nicknames that drew attention to their most striking features. Austerlitz was known as the white town (*weisse Stadt*) because of its distinct chalk-covered houses, but the nicknames that stuck to other Jewish communities (and their inhabitants) often revealed more colorful attributes.[2] The inhabitants of Nikolsburg, Moravia's largest Jewish community, were known as proud ones (*gavsonim*) because of their celebrated talmudic scholars.[3] In contrast, the inhabitants of Holleschau were known as idiots (*naronim*), a kind of Moravian counterpart to Poland's legendary "fools of Chelm."[4] In Prossnitz, where the Sabbatian heresy had made inroads in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the inhabitants were known as *Schepsen*, a derogatory term for the followers of the false messiah, Shabbetai Tsvi.[5] Triesch was known as Little Berlin (*Klein-Berlin*) because the Berlin-based Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) found many adherents in this small Moravian town in the first half of the nineteenth century.[6]

When Moravia came under Habsburg rule in 1526, its Jewish population was already concentrated in small and medium-size noble towns—a pattern of settlement that would characterize Moravian Jewry until the middle of the nineteenth century. This pattern, which emerged after the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century expulsions from Moravia's royal free towns, meant that no single Jewish community could claim to be the undisputed center of Moravian Jewry. Unlike neighboring Bohemia, where Prague eclipsed all the other Jewish communities, Moravia had several dozen Jewish communities that could vie with one another in economic, religious, and demographic terms. Nikolsburg, seat of the Moravian chief rabbinate and home to 10% of Moravia's Jewish population, was celebrated as a "city and mother in Israel" (*'ir va-em be-yisrael*), but Prossnitz, which was Moravia's second largest Jewish community, could certainly compete. Known as Jerusalem of the Hana (plains), Prossnitz was an illustrious center of rabbinic learning and by the beginning of the nineteenth century Moravia's wealthiest Jewish community. Still, Nikolsburg and Prossnitz were

not alone. Other Moravian communities, such as Boskowitz, Leipnik, Holleschau, and Trebitsch, not only had sizable Jewish communities but also boasted yeshivas that attracted students from neighboring Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, and Germany.

Compared with its neighbors—Bohemia, Hungary, the German lands, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—the uniqueness of Moravia's settlement pattern becomes apparent. In the eighteenth century, more than half of Bohemia's 30,000 Jews resided in Prague, and the rest were dispersed in roughly 800 "small villages and market towns."[7] Prague was a "city and mother in Israel," but in the Bohemian countryside, most localities were too small to even sustain a Jewish community. In this respect, Bohemia resembled Germany, where, up until the second half of the nineteenth century, the Jewish population was scattered across hundreds of tiny towns and villages, many of them unable to support a rabbi or ritual slaughterer.[8] Similarly, in the eighteenth century, most of Hungary's 15,000 Jews lived in "small clusters of families in isolated villages," a pattern that continued well into the nineteenth century.[9]

Only the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth could compare with Moravia, but even in this case the sheer size of the Jewish population (and of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) meant that Jewish settlement patterns differed by an order of magnitude. In 1754, only 20,000 Jews lived in Moravia,[10] compared with 750,000 living in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1764. At the time, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was home to more than half the Jews of the world, and the Lublin region alone had more Jews than all of Moravia.[11] In Poland-Lithuania, as in Moravia, the majority of Jews lived in small noble-owned "country towns," but the size and character of the towns in Poland-Lithuania differed considerably from those in Moravia. In Poland-Lithuania, a "substantial majority" of Jews lived in communities of 500 or more, and at least 16 communities had more than 2,000 Jews each; Brody, the largest community, had 8,600 Jews.[12] In Moravia, by contrast, only the 3,000-strong Nikolsburg community had more than 2,000 Jews, and the vast majority of Moravia's Jews lived in 52 medium-size communities that numbered 500 Jews or less. Unlike their counterparts in large swaths of Germany, Hungary, and

rural Bohemia, Moravia's Jewish communities were large enough to support rabbis, ritual slaughterers, ritual baths, synagogues, and—in many cases—yeshivas; but nowhere could they compare with Poland-Lithuania, where "a significant proportion" of Jews lived in towns, or shtetls, with a Jewish majority.[13]

Like Polish-Lithuanian Jewry, Moravian Jewry had a highly developed supracommunal organization, called the Council of the Land (va'ad ha-medinah), which helped draw together the individual Jewish communities as a single cohesive whole. Germany, Alsace, and rural Bohemia also had supracommunal organizations, but these Landjudenschaften (as they were called) were emblematic of the "atomized" Jewish life in these lands, where Jewish settlements were so scattered and so small that they had to share a rabbi, circumciser, ritual slaughterer, and a single supracommunal framework just to meet the basic requirements of Jewish law.[14] In contrast, Poland-Lithuania's Council of the Four Lands and Moravia's Council of the Land were emblematic of the complex and entangled Jewish life in territories where sizable Jewish communities vied with one another for importance and the supracommunal organization had to weigh the collective interests of Polish-Lithuanian (or Moravian) Jewry against the fierce independence of the individual Jewish communities. In other words, while the Landjudenschaften emerged in territories without Jewish communities of great significance, the Councils of the Land emerged in territories where multiple Jewish communities competed with one another for primacy.

In Moravia, the statutes of the Council of the Land were drafted to ensure that no single Jewish community could lord over the others. The Council was to meet every three years, but never were two consecutive assemblies to be held in the same community (or even in the same administrative district).[15] Between 1650 and 1748, the Council met twenty-three times in eleven different communities, but never did it meet in Nikolsburg or Prossnitz, Moravia's two largest Jewish communities.[16] For Nikolsburg, this is particularly noteworthy, because this community of "proud ones" could make a strong case for being the center of Moravian Jewry. In effect, the decentralized supracommunal structure helped ensure that Nikolsburg (and Prossnitz) would remain, at best, first among equals.

The Sum of Its Parts: The Jews and Jewish Communities of Moravia

The paramount importance of Moravia's individual Jewish communities has presented historians of Moravian Jewry with a singular challenge. Whereas some scholars have latched on to the Moravian chief rabbinate or the Council of the Land as expressions of a Moravian Jewish collectivity, most have preferred to examine Moravian Jewry through the prism of a single community, quite often their own. One of the earliest such studies, Moritz Duschak's "Towards a History of the Jews of Moravia" (1861), deals exclusively with Duschak's native town of Triesch.[17] Even the most comprehensive work on the subject, Hugo Gold's *Jews and Jewish Communities of Moravia in the Past and Present* (1929), shies away from the term *Moravian Jewry* and focuses instead on individual Jewish communities (and Jews). Of the eighty-four articles in Gold's anthology, the overwhelming majority are local histories of Moravian Jewish communities, large and small.

Moravian Jewish historiography flourished during five distinct periods. The first stage (1851–1880) centered around Leopold Löw (1811–1875), a Moravian-born rabbi, scholar, and publicist who served various Hungarian communities (Nagykanizsa, Pápa, and Szeged) between 1841 and 1875. Löw wrote groundbreaking articles on the Moravian chief rabbinate and the Moravian Jewish Enlightenment, and his scholarly journal, *Ben Chananja* (Szeged, 1858–1867), published a number of local histories written by Moritz Duschak (1815–1890), Gerson Wolf (1823–1892), and Nehemiah Brüll (1843–1891), all of whom were born and educated in Moravia. Wolf published documents from the Viennese archives in *Ben Chananja*, and in 1880 (after Löw's death), he also published the statutes for Moravia's Council of the Land, which had originally been translated into German for Empress Maria Theresa.[18]

Wolf's activities presaged the next stage (1895–1908), which witnessed the publication of primary sources and personal recollections dealing with the Jews of Moravia. In 1895, the liberal politician, Moravian patriot, and amateur historian Christian d'Elvert (1803–1896) published the first comprehensive history of the Jews of Moravia and Austrian Silesia.[19] Elvert was not Jewish, but he considered the Jewish experi-

ence to be part and parcel of Moravian history. In his effort to document Moravia's Jewish history, he made extensive use of the provincial archives in his native Brünn, bringing many important primary sources to light. In the same year, Isaac Hirsch Weiss (1815–1905), a Moravian-born scholar of rabbinic Judaism, published a Hebrew autobiography in which he reminisced about the dynamic rabbinic culture that characterized the Moravia of his youth.[20] Weiss possessed a keen historical sense, and his memoir is unquestionably the most important personal account of Moravian Jewish life in the nineteenth century. At roughly the same time, Weiss's younger contemporary, Emanuel Baumgarten (1828–1908), published a number of Hebrew manuscripts that shed light on Moravia's more distant past,[21] and Dr. Rabbi Adolf Frankel-Grün (1847–1916) published highly detailed histories of the Jewish communities in Kremsier (where he was rabbi) and Ungarisch-Brod (where he was born).[22]

In 1906, Gottlieb Bondy, a Jewish industrialist in Prague, and Franz Dworsky, director of the Bohemian archives, published a two-volume source collection that documented Jewish life in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia from 906 to 1620.[23] Dworsky's foreword stressed the ancient, uninterrupted history of Jewish settlement in these territories, a point that was underscored by the caption on the first document: "Jews resided in Bohemia and Moravia already in ancient times."[24] This work served as the basis for a source collection on Moravian Jewry, which was published in 1935 by Bertold Bretholz (1862–1936), an archivist in Brünn and a specialist on medieval Moravia.[25]

Bretholz's work was published during the third stage (1918–1938), which constituted the most productive period of research on the Jews of the Bohemian Lands. During this stage, which was coterminous with the First Czechoslovak Republic, scholarly activity centered around the Society for the History of the Jews in the Czechoslovak Republic (Gesellschaft für die Geschichte der Juden in der čechoslovakischen Republik) in Prague and the Jewish Book and Art Publisher (Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag) in Brünn. The society put out the scholarly journal *Jarhbuch der Gesellschaft für die Geschichte der Juden in der čechoslovakischen Republik* (1929–1938), which published articles—often of monograph length—on all aspects of Jewish life in the Bohemian Lands. (In 1935, it also launched a book series, but Bertold Bretholz's

source collection was the only work to be published.) In 1929, the Brünn-based Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag published Gold's *Jews and Jewish Communities of Moravia in the Past and Present*, which still remains the standard work on Moravian Jewry.[26] Hugo Gold, the Viennese-born head of the Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag, edited this volume and subsequently founded the *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in der Tschechoslowakei* (1930–1938), a quarterly journal devoted to "research on [this] hitherto disregarded and then strongly neglected field of Jewish local history."[27] Gold's *Zeitschrift* and the society's *Jahrbuch* published numerous articles on Moravian Jewry, most notably by the Prossnitz-born economic historian Bernhard Heilig (1902–1943).

After the destruction of Czechoslovak Jewry, the motto of Gold's *Zeitschrift* ("Out of the past, for the present and future") held little relevance for Moravia's decimated Jewish population. Gold had emigrated to Palestine in 1940, but many of his contributors (and readers) met more tragic fates. Heilig, for example, died in the Łodz ghetto in 1943. Not surprisingly, the fourth stage in Moravian Jewish historiography (1945–1989) reflects the new reality. Much of the literature in the immediate postwar decades was published in Israel or the United States and aimed to preserve the memory and legacy of the destroyed Jewish communities. A lengthy paean to Nikolsburg was published in Jerusalem in 1950, followed by a critical edition of Moravia's supracommunal statutes in 1951 and a critical edition of Nikolsburg's communal statutes in 1961.[28] Beginning in 1968, the New York–based Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews published a three-volume work, *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, which, in the plaintive words of its preface, "is a survey of a tragically concluded chapter."[29] In a similar vein, Hugo Gold, by then in Tel Aviv, published his *Memorial Book for Moravia's Jewish Communities*, a final epilogue to his 1929 volume, providing updated details on the tragic fate of Moravia's Jewish communities.[30]

In this period, there were some continuities with the prewar historiographic tradition. In 1965, the Jewish Museum in Prague began publishing *Judaica Bohemiae*, an annual journal that was conceived as the successor to *Jarhbuch der Gesellschaft für die Geschichte der Juden in der čechoslovakischen Republik*.[31] Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein (1910–2002), who had contributed to the penultimate volume of the interwar *Jahr-*

buch, also wrote for *Judaica Bohemiae* in the 1960s, establishing a personal link between the two publications.[32] After the rise of Nazism in her native Germany, Kestenberg-Gladstein had found refuge in Prague (1933–1938), where she began her lifelong research on the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia. In 1969, by then in Israel, she published a trailblazing monograph on the Jewish Enlightenment in the Bohemian Lands, which remains the most important work published in the four decades following the Holocaust.[33] (In the late 1980s, the American historian Hillel J. Kieval picked up the mantle and wrote a number of now classic studies, primarily on the Jews of Bohemia.)[34]

The fifth stage of Moravian Jewish historiography (1989–present), which begins with the Velvet Revolution, has produced synthetic works, such as Tomáš Pěkný's *History of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia*, and popular guidebooks, such as Jiři Fiedler's *Jewish Sights in Bohemia and Moravia*. Most of the original research, however, has been conducted on a small scale by the archivists, laypeople, and local historians who have been sharing their findings since 1994 at the annual "Židé a Morava" (Jews and Moravia) conference in Kroměříž (Kremsier), Czech Republic.[35] Two of these historians have written monographs on individual Jewish communities, in effect reviving the genre that characterized Moravian Jewish historiography at its inception.[36]

In the current work I set aside the communal history approach, choosing instead to view Moravian Jewry as a cohesive whole, the sum of its many complex parts. Based on a wide variety of sources from archives in the Czech Republic, Austria, Israel, and the United States, in this book I take a comparative approach to Moravian Jewry, examining its distinctiveness in an effort to shed light on a range of religious, ideological, political, and socioeconomic challenges that transformed Central European Jewry. Surprisingly, for a Jewish population that produced cultural giants, such as Sigmund Freud, Gustav Mahler, and Edmund Husserl, as well as renowned scholars of Judaism, such as Moritz Steinschneider, Leopold Löw, Adolf Jellinek, and Isaac Hirsch Weiss, there has been precious little research and not a single scholarly monograph on this subject.

In this book, I examine the Jews of Moravia during the Age of Emancipation, a period that is framed by the emancipation of French Jewry in 1790–91 and the subsequent emancipation of Russian Jewry in 1917.

The Jews of Moravia, like the Jews in the rest of the Habsburg monarchy, were initially emancipated during the Revolution of 1848 (and then again in 1867); the momentous events of 1848–49 were a turning point in the social, political, religious, and demographic development of Moravian Jewry, and as such, the Revolution of 1848 also serves as the fulcrum of this book. In the first chapters I examine the origins and development of Moravian Jewry from the Middle Ages onward, focusing on the compact and cohesive constellation of Jewish communities that remained intact until the Revolution of 1848. Until then, Moravian Jewry was characterized by its dense settlement pattern, relatively uniform socioeconomic status, high degree of communal self-government, and a venerable supracommunal organization with a chief rabbi at its head. Moravian Jewry tended to be uniformly settled in noble-owned villages, some of which had large populations but none of which could compare to such metropolises as Prague, Vienna, or Pest. Nikolsburg, the largest of Moravia's fifty-two Jewish communities and the seat of the chief rabbinate, was perhaps "first among equals," but it could not compare with Jewish communities situated in imperial or provincial capitals.

The Jewish communities were beset by residential and occupational restrictions and, more significantly, by the Familiants Laws of 1726–27, which allowed only firstborn Jewish males to marry. A constant source of communal strife and discord, these "pharaonic" Familiants Laws were sometimes circumvented through conversions to Christianity but more often through emigration to neighboring Hungary. In effect, these laws served to siphon off Moravia's young and disenchanted men, removing precisely the demographic group that was most likely to seek solace, hope, or rebellion in Hasidism or Haskalah, two characteristic responses to modernity among the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. This may explain why Hasidism failed to take root in Moravia and why both the Haskalah and the Reform movement were tamed in this Habsburg province. In fact, until the middle of the nineteenth century, Moravia was the only place in Europe where a network of German-Jewish schools (a hallmark of the Haskalah) and a thriving cluster of renowned yeshivas coexisted in harmony. Prossnitz was not only a center of traditional Jewish learning but also a center of the conservative "rabbinic Haskalah" and of moderate religious and educational reform.

The Familiants Laws and other restrictions placed artificial limitations on even the most natural of human urges and not surprisingly served as regular catalysts for the perennial discord that came to characterize Jewish communal life in Moravia in the first half of the nineteenth century. This discord was relieved temporarily during the Revolution of 1848, which provided a rare opportunity for the Jews of Moravia to coalesce around a common goal (Jewish emancipation) and a common leader (Samson Raphael Hirsch).

Hirsch, who served as Moravia's chief rabbi from 1847 to 1851, assumes a central place in the middle chapters of this book. Previous scholars have focused on Hirsch's subsequent tenure in Frankfurt-am-Main (1851–1888), which was marked by a militant and uncompromising defense of Orthodoxy. Hirsch's brief yet industrious sojourn in Moravia—which is crucial for gaining a full understanding of his later militancy—has received scant attention. German-born Hirsch came to Moravia with an almost messianic hope of unifying its Jews and guiding them into the Age of Emancipation with their traditional Jewish observance intact. After a frustrating four years in Moravia—including a prominent role in the Revolution of 1848—he departed for Frankfurt, convinced that unity was no longer a possibility as far as religious and communal affairs were concerned.

The Revolution of 1848 ushered in a new age of freedom, but it also precipitated demographic, financial, and social transformations that emerged precisely when the Czech-German conflict began to dominate public life in Moravia. In the final chapters of this book I examine these transformations—most notably the self-liquidation of small-town Jewry through migration to Vienna, Brünn, and other previously off-limits cities—and place them in the context of the virulent (and sometimes violent) nationality conflict. In these chapters I pay particular attention to unique features of the Moravian Jewish landscape—such as the political Jewish communities (*politische Judengemeinden*) and the network of German-Jewish schools—that helped preserve a Jewish "national" identity yet made Moravian Jewry all the more vulnerable to the vagaries of the nationality conflict. Indeed, the cautious embrace of Zionism was a way out of this conflict, but it was also a continuation of Moravian Jewry's distinctive role as mediator—and often tamer—of the major ideological movements that pervaded Central Europe in the "long nineteenth century."