

THE LIBRARY IN THERESIENSTADT, 1942 – 1945  
THE ROLE OF A READING INSTITUTION IN THE  
“FINAL RESOLUTION OF THE JEWISH QUESTION”

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The present study represents the intersection of different research approaches in cultural science: the general research into the extermination of European Jewry undertaken by the Nazis, research into culture and way of life in the Theresienstadt “model ghetto”, and, in the sphere of reading research, examining organizations, institutions and conditions of reading on the background of the genocide.

The principal target of the study is the question whether meaningful cultural work is possible in the face of the reign of totalitarianism and violence. The object selected is the “Jewish settlement” Theresienstadt, with its special role in the Nazi extermination plan being taken into account. Theresienstadt, set up in 1941 as “family and destination camp” (no transports further east) for the Jews from Bohemia and Moravia with “self administration” by Prague Zionists, became the “Jewish old-age ghetto” of the whole Reich in 1942. The project of the Prague Zionists was jeopardized by difficulties resulting from the Czech Jews being mixed with German and Austrian Jews. The specific organization of the Theresienstadt library under Emil Utitz, however, had its merits as an attempt at reaching a settlement between differing national groups by purposeful cultural work.