

CZECHS, GERMANS, JEWS –
WHERE IS THE DIFFERENCE?

The Complexity of National Identities of Bohemian Jews, 1918-1938

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The author examines the reasons why the issue of Jewish national identity in the Bohemian lands is so bewildering, and difficult to grasp for the historians. The main argument being put forward is that this is due to the differences between the various national identities being rather minor. That made it possible for people to change their national identity without this having far-reaching consequences for their everyday life; it was even possible to have several national identities at the same time. Basically, all Jews in the Bohemian lands had three features in common: a close link to the Bohemian lands because of an almost continuous Jewish settlement in Bohemia and Moravia, a rather loose relationship to the Jewish religion, and a distinct loyalty towards the Czechoslovak state. Then what separated persons of German, Czech or Jewish descent? Taking a closer look at the differences between the student organizations, Kapper and Theodor Herzl, the author reaches the conclusion that the most decisive factors in the choice of national affiliation were not language or political preference, but first and foremost social ties either with Jewish or with non-Jewish people.