

CHOOSING TO BRIDGE: REVISITING THE  
PHENOMENON OF JEWISH CULTURAL MEDIATION*Hillel J. Kieval*

Taking as its starting point Simmel's contrasting images of "bridges" and "doors" this article revisits the issue of the role of Bohemian Jewish writers and artists in the mediation of Czech and German culture in the early twentieth century. The author points out that the linked projects of appropriation, translation, and transmission were not directed at Czech culture alone, but also at German, and that the mediators were frequently Czech-speaking Jews. The article turns finally to the writings of the Prague Zionist circle around the First World War, in particular to the anthology "Das jüdische Prag" (1917), whose purpose seems to have been to reimagine the city and its culture as somehow intrinsic to Jewish experience. The author argues that, in assembling the anthology, the editorial board of "Selbstwehr" demonstrated an explicit preference for Czech poetry (on Jewish themes) and German prose (written by Bohemian Jews). The project reveals the extent to which the opening to Czech culture was accompanied by a simultaneous closing to certain bodies of German writing. It was an exercise in the reclaiming of a piece of the diaspora as "Jewish" space, which purposefully violated the assumptions of liberal German hegemony in the Czech lands; self-serving, to be sure, but also courageous.