

INTRODUCING INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY TO THE HISTORY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Multiethnic Cohabitation and Jewish Experience in Fin-de-Siècle Bohemia

Dimitry Shumsky

The author examines the Jewish side of the Czech-German-Jewish triangle on the eve of World War I using a methodological combination of intellectual and political history on one hand and historiography of everyday life on the other. For starters, he observes that the tendency of the political discourse, whether Czech or German, to look at Czechs and Germans as linguistically and culturally monolithic entities is quite misleading, especially if one extends it to the Jewish populace which has then to be split into "German Jews" and "Czech Jews." The resulting impression that most of Jewish society strictly adhered to either the German or the Czech position is definitely wrong with the majority of Jews who may be called bilingual, although it still holds true of quite a few people, in particular figures with a pronounced attachment to public and political bodies. Looking at the everyday experience of bilingual Jews, he finds a way of life that integrates German and Czech affinities at least to a certain extent. To gain more insights into the creative output and thinking of this group, he explores the everyday experience of a number of Jewish intellectuals from Prague in greater detail. To sum it all up, Brod's "Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen" is not a semi-utopian, semi-colonialist fantasy, but the reflection of the complex bilingual/bicultural existence experienced by Brod since birth.