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MAKING SENSE OF A RUIN:  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENTILE IMAGES  
OF THE OLD JEWISH CEMETERY IN PRAGUE\*

Although reports about the presence of a Jewish community in Prague are old and numerous, detailed descriptions of Prague's Jewish Town appear relatively late. Thus Karl Adolph Redel's "Das sehens-würdige Prag" (1710), probably the earliest monograph dedicated exclusively to Prague,<sup>1</sup> proceeds section by section to cover all the historical townships of the city, stretching to well over 500 pages, but the Jewish Town is treated on just three pages, two of which are purely historical. Redel mentions the existence of nine synagogues and, outside the Jewish Town proper, the Jewish market, the *Tandelmarkt*, but the locality known today as the Old Jewish Cemetery (henceforth the Cemetery) is not mentioned – it became visible to Gentiles only at the end of the eighteenth century, the peak of the Enlightenment in the Habsburg Monarchy. The present paper surveys the growing presence of the Cemetery in printed Gentile sources, mostly nineteenth-century travelogues, travel guides, and collections of Prague legends, analyzes the discursive strategies of their authors, traces their underlying agendas, and speculates about the Cemetery's potential as a vehicle of Gentile memory.

The emerging picture can be sketched out as follows: on the one hand, there is a relatively amorphous group of German-language texts, mainly from the first half of the nineteenth century, that echo the *Schauerromantik* of the period and represent the Cemetery as a locus of otherness. By contrast, Czech-language texts on the Cemetery appear somewhat later. Unlike the German-language texts, they often attempt to integrate the Cemetery into the historical narrative about Prague. However, there are strings attached. Empathy with Jews and their incorporation into the Czech national narrative are generally predicated on the wish, if not the condition, that Bohemian (and Prague) Jews identify themselves with the Czech national cause. The Czech texts thus reflect a political and cultural background that is marked by the surge in Czech nationalism. The rest of this paper focuses on details and provides a more nuanced account than this quick summary.

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<sup>1</sup> Redel, Karl Adolph: *Das sehens-würdige Prag, worinnen alle sehens-, merck- und wunderwürdige Begebenheiten, Denckmale und Antiquitäten [...] vorgestellt werden*. Nürnberg, Prag [dedication dated 1710], 451.

*Enlightened Agendas: No Fairy Tales, and Date It Right!*

From the late eighteenth century onwards, written sources on Prague show an increased level of detail and an interest in the ways the city functions as a contemporary urban entity. Prague Jews and their institutions are not excluded from the purview of these texts. In 1787 Johann Friedrich Ernst Albrecht (1752-1814), a German author who resided in Prague at the end of the century, made the following observation on the Cemetery:

For them [the Jews] it has been an extremely sensitive matter that they have to choose a burial place different from the previous one. They have been fending this off for a long time because gathering together with their fathers is an essential matter for them and by their teaching they consider anyone who happens to die in a foreign place extremely unfortunate.<sup>2</sup>

In making this comment, Albrecht demonstrates his local knowledge. In 1787 the Cemetery was closed for funerals by the imperial decree prohibiting interment within city walls. But strictly speaking, Albrecht's note is not about the Cemetery *per se*. Albrecht comments on the functioning of Prague's contemporary Jewish community. In so doing, he reveals himself as an author interested in current affairs – he speaks neither as a historian nor as an esthetically-minded antiquarian.

For Albrecht and most of his Enlightened peers, the Jewish Town and its cemetery were not particularly interesting as places of antiquity or esthetic delight. Rather, these authors saw the quarter as a stronghold of superstition and obscurity. Professional historians also held this opinion. When Gelasius Dobner (1719-1790), a cleric and historian of Bohemia, and his student Abbé Josef Dobrovský (1753-1829), a famous philologist, did on-site research at the Cemetery, they mainly wished to obtain accurate dates. Prague Jewish history seemed to leave much to be desired in this respect. Commenting on contemporary pamphlets about Prague Jews, Dobrovský complained in 1786 that “they were compiled by very unreliable authors with no selection, no examination, and silly fairytales were presented as historical facts.”<sup>3</sup> He continued to be critical in the decades that followed. Caroline Pichler (1769-1843), an author and the wife of a high-ranking Viennese official, recorded in her memoirs that when she visited the Cemetery in the 1820s, accompanied by Dobrovský and a rabbi:

[Dobrovský] got involved in a very vigorous, and additionally almost comical argument as he did not want to accept some of the rabbi's authoritative-sounding historical explanations, e.g., that one of the tombs is a tomb of an ancient queen. He declared this all to be fables or legends at best.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Albrecht, Johann Friedrich Ernst [authorship attributed]: *Beobachtungen in und über Prag von einem reisenden Ausländer*. Vol. 1. Prag 1787, 115. In the German original: “Äußerst empfindlich ist es diesen [den Juden], daß sie einen andren als den bisherigen Platz zu ihren Begräbnissen erwählen müssen. Sie haben sich auch lange dawider gesträubt, denn das zu ihren Vätern versammelt werden, ist bey ihnen ein Hauptpunkt, und sie schätzen nach ihrer Lehre immer jeden für äußerst unglücklich, der auf einem fremden Orte umkam.”

<sup>3</sup> Dobrovský, Josef: [Untitled]. In: *Litterarisches Magazin für Böhmen und Mähren* (Prag) 2 (1786) 125. In the German original: “Denn das Angeführte ist aus sehr unzuverlässigen Schriftstellern ohne Wahl, ohne Prüfung zusammengetragen, und die albernen Märchen als historische Tatsachen aufgestellt worden.”

<sup>4</sup> Pichler, Caroline: *Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben*. Vol. 4. Wien 1844, 37. In the

Dobrovský was, of course, right, and he would have argued with anyone in the world if he ran into badly documented claims, regardless of whether that person was Christian or Jewish. A critical analysis of historical data was his priority.

### *Beyond the Enlightenment*

To be fair to the record, Gentile appreciation of the Cemetery is not entirely lacking in the eighteenth century. A two-volume monograph on Prague from 1787, attributed to Johann Ferdinand Opitz (1741-1812), mentions the Cemetery twice in admiration, in one case even with the author's exclamation mark. The Cemetery is "prächtig" (splendid) and some of the tombstones "von ungemeiner Größe!" (of uncommon size).<sup>5</sup> Although not a sign of cutting-edge esthetic sensibility, appreciation of size arguably borders on a rudimentary esthetic judgment.

While impressions of the Cemetery from subsequent decades continue to express amazement at its size, they often show ambivalence if not aversion. Things Jewish, regardless of their size, were increasingly perceived as signs of gloom and decay. This is apparent in the discourse of Gentile German-language writers, most of them Bohemian Germans, who described the Cemetery in the 1830s and 1840s, the first golden era of tourist guides and travelogues in Bohemia. Among other things, these authors repeatedly associate the Cemetery's flora with images of gloom. We first find this motif in a text from 1836 by Anton Müller, and later in a number of texts including Franz Klutschak's 1838 essay on the Cemetery – the first extensive text on the subject; the 1841 edition of his Prague guide; Carl Reginald Herloßsohn's Bohemian travelogue of 1841; and a travelogue from 1842 by Johann Georg Kohl:

[Anton Müller, 1836] In its labyrinthine walkways, the uneven site, wildly overgrown with lilac bushes, offers a sad picture of earthly transience, of which each step reminds one. [...] No gardener's knife cuts the branches, which stretch down into the irregular maze of this sad burial site.<sup>6</sup>

[Franz Klutschak, 1838] Thousands of gravestones [...], many of them weathered by the atmospheric effect of centuries, colossal sarcophagi, which bear witness to the artistic sensibility of the time to which they belong, rise from the undulating, grassy ground under the branches of old, knotted lilac bushes.<sup>7</sup>

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German original: "[daß Dobrovský] in einen sehr heftigen und uns Übrigen fast komischen Streit geriet, indem Dobrowsky dem Rabbi mehrere seinsollende geschichtliche Nachweisungen, z.B. das Grabmal einer alten Königin, nicht gelten lassen wollte, und dies alles für Fabeln oder höchstens Sagen erklärte."

<sup>5</sup> [Opitz, Johann Ferdinand]: Vollständige Beschreibung der königlichen Haupt- und Residenzstadt Prag [...]. Vol. 2. Prag, Wien 1787, 289, and vol. 1, 205, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> [Müller, Anton]: Erinnerung an Prag in bildlichen Ansichten und historischen Erläuterungen [...]. Prag 1836, no pagination. In the German original: "Der unebene, mit Fliegerbüschen wild überzogene Platz bietet in seinen labyrinthischen Gängen ein trauriges Bild der irdischen Vergänglichkeit, an die man mit jedem Fußstritte gemahnt wird. [...] Kein Gartenmesser schneidet die Äste ab, welche sich in die ungebahnten Irrgänge dieses traurigen Begräbnisortes herabstrecken."

<sup>7</sup> Cluth, J. [i.e., Klutschak, Franz]: Der alte Judenfriedhof in Prag und seine Sagen. Originally in: Panorama des Universums (Prag), 1838; quoted from a later edition in Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums 3 (1839) No. 58, 234. In the German original: "Tausende von Grab-

[*Franz Klutschak*, 1841] The Jewish Cemetery (the Old), (Jewish Town, Saliter Street). The innumerable tombstones; the wild and contorted lilac bushes growing on the graves; the numerous Jewish ghost stories, transposed into this place of peace; in addition, the idea of the transience of earthly things – all this gives this place an eerily mysterious character.<sup>8</sup>

[*Carl Reginald Herloßsohn*, 1841] [The cemetery] is immense, covered with countless grave-stones in the shape of cubes, pyramids, and slabs, over which, wild and tangled, ancient lilac trees stretch their bulbous branches.<sup>9</sup>

[*Johann Georg Kohl*, 1842] The entirety is over-arched with old lilac-bushes, which entwine themselves from stone to stone with their gnarled and contorted branches and roots. These lilac-bushes are the only trees in the churchyard and they constantly regenerate themselves anew. Some of them have grown together with the gravestones so much that it seems that they must be just as old as those stones.<sup>10</sup>

Among these authors, Anton Müller (1792-1845), a professor of esthetics at Charles University, stands out because of his interventionist attitude – for him the Cemetery's unchecked flora provoked a call for a gardener. No wonder: Müller was an advocate of the Biedermeier philosophy of cleanliness and order, very much in agreement with the official line. After all, he had been brought to Prague by Count Chotek, the highest officer of the Kingdom of Bohemia, who was generally hailed as a kindhearted administrator interested in improving Prague's public spaces. In the rest of his commentary Müller argued that the authorities had demonstrated a benevolent approach – instead of razing the Cemetery, they had put a new wall around it.

Not everyone who wrote about the Cemetery's flora thought in such practical terms, however. Wild flora had been a characteristic motif in meditations about ruins, visual or literary, since the eighteenth century. The motif was generally thought to prompt exemplary spiritual insights into the human condition. Writing about Tintern Abbey in Wales, a much-discussed ruin, Thomas Hearne (1744-1817), a

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steinen [...], viele verwittert durch die atmosphärische Einwirkung von Jahrhunderten, kolossale Sarkophage, für den Kunstsinn der Zeiten, denen sie angehören, zeugend, ragen aus dem hügeligen, grasbewachsenen Boden unter den Laubdornen alter, knorriger Fliederbüsche hervor."

<sup>8</sup> *Klutschak*, Franz: *Der Führer durch Prag*. Prag, 2nd ed. 1841, 37 f. In the German original: "Judenfriedhof (der alte), (Judenstadt, Salitergasse). Die zahllosen Grabsteine, die wild und verworren wachsenden Fliederbüsche auf den Gräbern, die vielen jüdischen Gespenstermärchen, deren Schauplatz auf diese Stätte des Friedens versetzt wird, hierzu der Gedanke an die Vergänglichkeit alles Irdischen, verleihen diesem Ort einen schauerlich geheimnißvollen Charakter."

<sup>9</sup> *Herloßsohn*, Carl Reginald: "Judenfriedhof"; quoted from his *Wanderungen durch das Riesengebirge und die Grafschaft Glatz*, Leipzig [1841], 155 f. In the German original: "[Der Friedhof] ist von ungeheurem Umfange, mit zahllosen Grabsteinen in Form von Würfeln, Pyramiden, Platten bedeckt, über welche wild und verworren uralte Fliederbäume ihre knolligen Äste hinstrecken."

<sup>10</sup> *Kohl*, Johann Georg: *Reise in Böhmen*. Dresden, Leipzig 1842, 163. In the German original: "Das Ganze überwölben alte Hollunderbüsche, die mit ihren knorrigen und vielgewundenen Ästen und Wurzeln von Stein zu Stein ranken. Diese Hollunderbüsche sind die einzigen Bäume auf dem Kirchhofe, und sie erzeugen sich beständig von Neuem. Einige sind der Art mit den Leichensteinen verwachsen, daß sich daraus ergibt, daß sie ebenso alt wie diese Steine sein müssen."

watercolor painter and member of the Society of Antiquaries, who visited the abbey in the 1780s and 1790s, noted that its beautiful arches were “obscured by foliage, or edged by the tendrils of ivy [...] every thing impressing the mind with the idea of decay, but offering shattered memorials of former grandeur.”<sup>11</sup> Another visitor, who was a clergyman, artist, and influential voice in the early esthetics of travel, William Gilpin (1724-1804), summed up his experience of Tintern Abbey as follows: “[A] very enchanting [sic] piece of ruin. Nature has now made it her own” (1782).<sup>12</sup> Both commentators saw the ruin as a site that exemplified a distinct process, the cycle of nature, and they used the image of rich flora to represent it.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe followed a similar line in his 1813 observations on landscapes by the Dutch painter Jacob Isaacksz van Ruysdael (1628-1682), which include a ruinous monastery and an abandoned cemetery. For Goethe, there was nothing morbid in these images. Van Ruysdael’s monastery ruin was an admirable attempt “to connect in the most graphic manner what has passed away with what is living.”<sup>13</sup> Rich flora was an essential element in Van Ruysdael’s painting because its presence illustrated the cycle of nature. The cemetery painting was even more pleasing to Goethe since he noted a brook in it which, although obstructed by the ruins, vigorously unfolded its force. Everything was in order – nature was reclaiming a human artifact.<sup>14</sup>

The cycle of nature is referred to in our quotes – e.g. in Kohl’s gloss on lilac trees that “constantly regenerate themselves a new” – but on the whole, it is not dominant. By and large, our authors found it hard to see a Jewish cemetery as an exemplary site of life renewing itself. And they also made quips about the expression *beth chajim* (“house of life”), a Hebrew term used to denote a cemetery (see also Goedsche below). Klutschak highlighted horror rather than life. His description in 1838 is telling in this respect. The above quote from this lengthy text continues:

“If I were a poet, I would use it as a setting for an eerie epic, into which the bodies of the Talmudists resting here would rise up in the moonlight. The story – or legend – of the lives of some of the men resting here certainly provides material for an epic composition, and the ghost stories would yield superb romances.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from *Matheson*, C. S.: *Enchanting Ruin: Tintern Abbey and Romantic Tourism in Wales*; an Exhibit from the University of Michigan Special Collections Library, 2007. <http://www.lib.umich.edu/enchanting-ruin-tintern-abbey-romantic-tourism-wales>, accessed online on Sept. 17, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Goethe*, Johann Wolfgang: *Ruysdael als Dichter*. In his *Sämtliche Werke* (Jubiläums-Ausgabe in 40 Bänden). Vol. 35: *Schriften zur Kunst*. Stuttgart 1902 ff., 3-8. In the German original: “[...] das Abgestorbene mit dem Lebendigen in die anschaulichste Verbindung [zu bringen].”

<sup>14</sup> In view of the fact that Ruysdael’s cemetery painting represents a Jewish cemetery, as can be seen from the modern title “The Jewish Cemetery at Ouderkerk” (1655-1660), it is unclear why Goethe does not describe the tombs as Jewish.

<sup>15</sup> *Klutschak*: *Der alte Judenfriedhof* 234 (cf. fn. 8). In the German original: “Wäre ich ein Dichter, ich ließe ein gespenstiges Epos da spielen, zu dem die Leiber der hier ruhenden Talmudisten im Mondscheinlichte mir auferstehen müßten. Die Geschichte – oder Sage – des Lebens mancher hier ruhenden Männer bietet gewiß Stoff zu einer epischen Dichtung, und die Gespenstermärchen gäben herrliche Romanzen.”

He then continues by narrating “one of the most eerie Jewish ghost stories which are set in this cemetery.”<sup>16</sup> It was the legend about the Black Death that killed almost the entire child population of the ghetto.

The eeriness, dreadfulness and horror of the place – this was, of course, another prevailing trope, albeit one very different from the cycle of life. While the latter is essentially a universalizing trope that cleanses the place of the local and the particular, thereby obliterating its history, the former has the opposite effect.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, courting horror was now a source of pleasure. This was not completely new. Writing about his walks in the Alps, Jean-Jacques Rousseau confessed: “I need torrents, rocks, firs, dark woods, mountains, steep roads to climb or descend, abysses beside me that make me afraid.”<sup>18</sup> He continued by telling the reader that fear (*peur*) even had a certain charm. As a trope, however, the desire for fear had a considerable range, eventually becoming trivialized in the melodramatic esthetics of the *Schauerromantik* exemplified by Klutschak. But more importantly, while Rousseau may represent a milestone in the history of the interiorization of landscape experience, Klutschak’s “wundersam schauerliches Gefühl” derives its force from an ethnic gaze. It revolves around the horror of Otherness prompted by Jewish, i.e. ethnic, practices.

To see what the emerging concept of “horrible Otherness” involved, let us turn to the portrayal of the Cemetery by Carl Reginald Herloßsohn (1804-1849), another German-language author from Bohemia.<sup>19</sup> His is a uniquely intense – and safely forgotten – description that reveals horror and distancing. The 1841 passage quoted above continues:

A wondrously eerie feeling encompasses the visitor entering this soundless and colorless wasteland. This churchyard cannot be compared to any Christian graveyard. Over the latter, even though the crosses and graves are moss-covered and sunken, the odd gleam of light flickers – there, the human being does not feel so appallingly abandoned, alone, miserable! Here a strange horror dwells – no hope, no feeling of resurrection dares to steal into the breast of the Christian who tarries here. It is as if even the birds have fallen silent here, as if the wind does not dare to stir the black-green branches. With the first step inside these walls, into this labyrinth of sunken stones and tangled tree-clusters, the Christian feels that here he is treading the burial ground of a different people, a race of a different faith. Nothing – not the remotest similarity with the monotony of a Herrnhut churchyard; a cheerless contrast with the friendliness of a Mohammedan burial ground, and how different, how ancient compared to all modern Jewish graveyards! – Here no loud laments could resound; for laments still bear wit-

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* In the German original: “[...] eines der schauerlichsten jüdischen Gespenstermärchen, die auf diesem Friedhofe spielen.”

<sup>17</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out that the shift from universalizing approaches to ruins characteristic of the eighteenth century, to a historical, often national, perspective has been argued in *Fritzsche*, Peter: *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History*. Cambridge, MA 2004. I believe my material converges with Fritzsche’s sophisticated analysis.

<sup>18</sup> *Rousseau*, Jean-Jacques: *Confessions*, pt. 1, book 4. In the French original: “Il me faut des torrents, des rochers, [...] des précipices à mes côtés, qui me fassent bien peur.”

<sup>19</sup> For newer research on Herloßsohn see *Urválková*, Zuzana: *Dvojlomná zrcadlení – Dílo Karla Herloše-Herloßsohna v českém literárním kontextu* [Double Reflexion: Karel Herloš-Herloßsohn’s Work in the Czech Literary Context]. Praha 2009. – Some older sources, e.g., *Kohut*, A.: *Berühmte israelitische Männer und Frauen*. Vol. 1. Berlin 1900, list him as Jewish. This is incorrect.

ness to life; rather, there reigns a muffled, compressed pain, a fatalistic abnegation, a brooding upon death and decay. – I have no words for the sensations welling up in someone who treads this site for the first time. He will not tarry here long; for nowhere in the world, not even in the deepest dungeon, can it be so eerie; and yet the air blows freely here, the sky gazes down through these branches and leaves, on the grass and moss. – Speechless, on a half-sunken gravestone, there sits a grey, weathered Hebrew, with tangled beard and extinguished eye, as if made of stone.<sup>20</sup>

To contextualize this passage: it was written by a Bohemian German-language author, then living in Leipzig, attracted by its liberal literary environment. Herloßsohn was on friendly terms with the representatives of Young Germany (Junges Deutschland) and did not demonstrate any anti-Jewish feelings, and yet his report on the Cemetery quickly progresses from being a typical cemetery meditation to emphasizing the uncanny, with the author distancing himself from the ethnic Other. What is most striking is Herloßsohn's repeated Christian focus. Thus in claiming that the Cemetery cannot be compared to any Christian cemetery, Herloßsohn brings a doctrinal dimension to his text. The visitor is horrified as a Christian who, among other things, cannot see any hope of resurrection (Auferstehung). In other words, the horror of the Cemetery blends with the horror of religious Otherness. The place makes "the Christian feel [...] that here he is treading the burial ground of a different people, a race of a *different faith*." (emphasis added)

Since Herloßsohn was otherwise not known to have voiced a specific religious agenda, his emphasis on a doctrinal perspective might initially seem surprising. Still, the passage can be related to a line of reasoning that saw Judaism as an obsolete religion, or as no religion at all. Such voices were heard, for example, among the philosophers who played a key role in the emergence of German idealism – Kant, Herder, Hegel – and in subsequent discussions. For Hegel, Judaism was an obsolete doc-

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<sup>20</sup> *Herloßsohn*: "Judenfriedhof" 155 f. (cf. n. 9). In the German original: "Ein wundersam schauerliches Gefühl erfaßt den Eintretenden in dieser laut- und farblosen Öde. Keinem christlichen Gottesacker ist dieser Kirchhof zu vergleichen. Über jenen zucken noch, wenn auch Kreuze und Gräber vermoost, versunken, einzelne Lichtblicke – der Mensch fühlt sich daselbst nicht so entsetzlich verlassen, allein, elend! Hier aber wohnt ein seltsames Grauen – die Hoffnung, das Gefühl der Auferstehung wagt es nicht einzuziehen in die Brust des Christen, der hier weilt. Es ist, als wären hier sogar die Vögel verstummt, als wage es der Wind nicht, die schwarzgrünen Äste zu bewegen. Beim ersten Schritte in diese Mauern, in dieses Irrgewinde von umsunkenen Steinen und verworrenen Baumgruppen fühlt der Christ, dass er hier die Grabstätte eines anderen Volkes, eines andersgläubigen Geschlechts betritt. Keine – nicht die entfernteste Ähnlichkeit mit der Monotonie eines herrnhutischen Gottesackers; düster der Contrast mit der Freundlichkeit einer muhamedanischen Begräbnisstätte, und wie verschieden, wie uralt gegen alle modernen Judenkirchhöfe! – Hier konnte keine laute Klage ertönen; denn Klage zeugt noch vom Leben; sondern es waltete der dumpfe, gepresste Schmerz, das fatalistische Entsagen, das Hineinbrüten in Tod und Verwesung. – Ich habe keine Worte für die Empfindungen, die denjenigen durchwallen, welcher zum ersten Male diese Stätte betritt. Lange wird er hier nicht weilen; denn nirgends auf der Erde, selbst im tiefsten Kerker, kann es so unheimlich sein und doch weht die Luft hier frei, blickt der Himmel hernieder durch diese Zweige und Blätter, auf die Gräser und Moose. – Stumm sitzt dort, auf einem halbversunkenen Grabstein, eine graue, verwitterte Hebräergestalt, mit wirrem Bart und erloschenen Augen, selbst wie aus Stein geformt."

trine, a religion that refused to rejoin history.<sup>21</sup> Herloßsohn is not a philosopher, but he makes a literary contribution of his own by nailing the argument down with a graphic image of this religion's dead nature: the Cemetery is not entirely empty; Herloßsohn spots an old Jew sitting on one of the graves: "Speechless, on a half-sunken gravestone, there sits a gray, weathered Hebrew, with tangled beard and extinguished eye, as if made of stone." Note that this Jewish man has all attributes of a fossil: he is as if "made of stone" (aus Stein), "silent" (stumm), and his sight has been extinguished (erloschen). This language is consonant with the understanding of Jews as a petrified race incapable of change.

Herloßsohn thus goes well beyond the cycle-of-nature imagery, giving the Cemetery a place in Grand History, in which Jews are the losers. The Cemetery is not a ruin that came about due to a natural calamity and the question of whether it will be reclaimed by nature is essentially irrelevant. This is the ruin of a race that turned out to be an unpromising relic. On leaving "the masses of stone" (Steinmassen) behind, Herloßsohn gives the Cemetery a new name: "a Palmyra among the cemeteries,"<sup>22</sup> thereby explicitly asserting the status of the Cemetery as a ruin.

Although Herloßsohn seems to reach a remarkable degree of othering, there was ample space to proceed further. Herrmann Goedsche (1815-1878), better known under his pen name Sir John Retcliffe, succeeded in taking that step thirty years later. In his well-known novel "Biarritz" (1868) – recently revived in Umberto Eco's "Il cimitero di Praga" – he situated the action of one of the chapters at the Cemetery, making it the scene of a secret Sanhedrin during which Jewish elders hatch a conspiracy leading to Jewish *Weltherrschaft*. The chapter later served as a template for the so-called Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an influential anti-Semitic tract. Needless to say, Goedsche's Cemetery is "eerie" (unheimlich) and within it the focus is on the tomb of Rabbi Simeon ben Jehuda, who figures as a Master of Kabbalah. Not surprisingly, his tomb is situated "under an ancient lilac tree" (unter einem uralten Fliederbaum).<sup>23</sup>

Unlike Herloßsohn, who portrayed the Cemetery as a dead place, Goedsche sees it as teeming with life, and sarcastically describes the place as a breeding ground for future evil:

*Beth-Chajim – the House of Life!* is what the cemetery is called. To be sure, this resting place of the dead is truly a House of Life! For it is from here that the mysterious, powerful impulse originates which makes the outcasts lords of the earth, the despised the tyrants of nations, and which is supposed to fulfill for the children of the Golden Calf the promises once made to God's people in the fiery thorn bush.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This line of thought is critically discussed, among other places, in Rose, Paul Lawrence: *Revolutionary Anti-Semitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner*. Princeton, NJ, 1990.

<sup>22</sup> *Herloßsohn*: "Judenfriedhof" 156 (cf. n. 9). In the German original: "[...] das Palmyra unter den Kirchhöfen."

<sup>23</sup> *Retcliffe*, Sir John: *Biarritz*. Erste Abteilung: Gaëta – Warschau – Düppel. Vol. 1. Berlin 1868, 144.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* In the German original: "*Beth-Chajim – das Haus des Lebens!* heißt der Friedhof! Ja, wohl ist diese Ruhestätte der Todten das Haus des Lebens! Denn von hier aus geht der geheimnisvolle, gewaltige Impuls, der die Vertriebenen zu den Herren der Erde macht, die Verachteten zu den Tyrannen der Völker, der den Kindern des Goldenen Kalbes die Verheißungen erfüllen soll, die einst im flammenden Dornbusch dem Volke Gottes gegeben wurden!"



The Golden Calf incidentally appears in a bluish glow radiating from Rabbi Simeon's grave when the Jewish elders march around it at midnight, mumbling. Klutschak's wish for an eerie epic staged in the Cemetery is now realized.

Goedsche traces the trajectory along which the novel's protagonists walk to the Cemetery in order to observe the Sanhedrin secretly. The path does not simply lead from one part of the city to another. Goedsche hints strongly at a distinct border between the Jewish Town and the rest of Prague, thus performing an act of symbolic excorporation. Although the protagonists who slip into the Cemetery illegally have to climb over the cemetery wall, their first step involves entering the Jewish Town. And after they are discovered as intruders and hastily flee over the Cemetery wall, they merely reenter the ghetto, still facing the problem of how to get out into Prague. This topography was actually not new. As early as 1812, Sebastian Willibald Schießler (1791-1867), another German-language author living in Prague, was clear on the nature of and the reasons for this separation: "The *Jewish Town* is located in the lower parts of the Old Town, and its name, which separates it from the whole, is to be credited exclusively to its *alien* inhabitants" (emphasis in the original).<sup>25</sup>

### *Tales of Empathy*

Despite differences, the material reviewed thus far is characterized by an almost complete lack of empathy. However, it might be argued that since we are talking about Gentile sources, expectations of empathy are unreasonable. Moreover, a place that represents a liminal territory between life and death may be inherently difficult for outsiders to deal with. But this reasoning is superficial and is contradicted by counterexamples.

One of the Gentile sightseers who does show some empathy on a visit to the Cemetery is Václav Bolemír Nebeský (1818-1882), a Czech-language author of the late National Revival. His works include a short prose text "Rabbi Löb" (1844),<sup>26</sup> in which he provides what is the first example in Czech of a sympathetic visit to the Cemetery, one that is quite different from Dobrovský's criticism of Jewish legends. Nebeský goes beyond mere description, acknowledging that the Cemetery is more than just an accumulation of stones. The tombs trigger stories, thus functioning as vehicles of memory, above all the tomb of Rabbi Löw:

[...] among the grave-stones into which the sorrow and pain of long-deceased generations is chiseled, there stands an ancient tomb of a unique character, made like a hut without windows, long, narrow, put together from six stones. [...] Hebrew inscriptions, those sacred signs of the Hebrew tribe – the oldest, the chosen, the miraculous one, cover this whole tomb. They are mysterious runes, these mystical signs of the noblest language of mankind, the language in which the book of life is written.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Schießler, S. W.: Prag und seine Umgebungen [...]. Vol. 1. Prag, Töplitz 1812, 27. In the German original: "Die *Judenstadt* liegt im Weichengebiet der Altstadt, und ihr Trennungsname vom Ganzen ist nur ihren *fremden* Bewohnern zuzuschreiben."

<sup>26</sup> Nebeský, V[áclav Bolemír]: Pověsti Židovské [Jewish Legends]. In: Květy 11 (1844) 374-375.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 374. In the Czech original: "[...] mezi kameny, v něžto je žal a bol dávno zahynulých pokolení vtesaný, stojí starobylý náhrobek rázu zvláštního; jako chatrč bez oken, dlouhý,

Nebeský then focuses on the rabbi. Although buried, he is actually sitting inside the tomb, deep in his studies and awaiting the final pronouncement. When an angelic messenger delivers it, he turns to dust. Details such as these make the story unique. Suffice it to say that they reveal the author as an insider cognizant of rabbinical *ars moriendi*.<sup>28</sup> This is not a place haunted by dead rabbis – recall Klutschak's eerie epic at the Cemetery with the Talmudists resurrected in the moonlight – but a place of Jewish memory. In respectfully re-narrating a rabbinical legend, the Gentile performs an empathetic appropriation of this memory.

For his time Nebeský was an exception. Czech-language literary authors began to focus on the Cemetery only in the 1880s, but once they did, their narratives assumed a distinct quality and became literary negotiations of the Jewish presence in Prague. In the end, the result was a gesture of incorporation rather than excorporation. The earliest example of such a text was written by Josef Svátek (1835-1897), a prolific author of historical novels and a professional historian. His *Prague Tales and Legends*<sup>29</sup> of 1883 brings together some 220 tales, mostly about specific localities including city districts, palaces, churches, and even springs and wells. Twelve of them have Jewish themes. Svátek knows the stories revolving around the Old-New Synagogue and the Cemetery. Although little known today, Svátek was a popular author and was undoubtedly read by Alois Jirásek (1851-1930), another author with a strong interest in Czech history. Like Svátek, Jirásek wrote legends, most importantly *Staré pověsti české* (Ancient Czech Legends) (1894), originally conceived as stories for young readers. Although there is little doubt that his enterprise was much more explicitly patriotic than Svátek's, there is a group of Jewish legends within the Prague section entitled "From the Jewish Town". The Cemetery is included. Svátek and Jirásek's collections of legends must be seen as incorporative since they incorporate vehicles of Jewish memory into the mainstream Prague narrative – Jewish legends seem to be intertwined with Czech Prague legends as if the two have always belonged together.

The prominent 1903 monograph *Pražské ghetto* (Prague Ghetto) written by a group of Czech Gentile authors also follows the incorporative line.<sup>30</sup> It includes a section on the Cemetery by Ignát Herrmann (1854-1935), an author who devoted much of his oeuvre to Prague. Herrmann's discursive strategy contrasts strongly with that found in older narratives of horror and gloom. In itself, the mere fact that he reports concerning a visit to the Cemetery on a bright sunny day is telling:

The day was ablaze and the white petals of blossoming lilac released their sharp pungent smell over the entire space; only the languid jasmine shrubs could compete here and there. Rays of

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ouzký ze šesti velkých kamenů sestavený. [...] Celý tento náhrobek je pokryt hebrejskými nápisy, svatými těmi znameními kmene hebrejského nejstaršího, vyvoleného a zázračného. Jsou to tajuplné runy, tyto mystické znaky nejvelebnější řeči čelověčerstva, řeči, kterou je kniha života psána."

<sup>28</sup> For details see my "Renarrating the Rabbi" (cf. note \*).

<sup>29</sup> Svátek, Josef: *Pražské pověsti a legendy* [Prague Tales and Legends]. Praha 1883 (Reprint Praha 1997.)

<sup>30</sup> Herrmann, Ignát/Teige, Josef/Winter, Zikmund (eds.): *Pražské ghetto* [Prague Ghetto]. Praha 1903.

sun were casting flashes of gold on the weathered stones of Jewish graves through picturesque branches, illuminating the ancient Hebrew letters, with which the Ten Commandments of Sinai were written, the most succinct and profound Book of Law in the world.<sup>31</sup>

Hermann is also able, and pleased, to find life in the Cemetery: there are butterfly cocoons in the chiseled Hebrew letters on the gravestones and, more importantly, “on a pathway Jewish children are sitting, girls untie their plaits – there is life again.”<sup>32</sup> Gender seems to play a role.<sup>33</sup>

The gesture of incorporation was not limited to literature. Besides partial views of the Cemetery, such as those focusing on the tombs, art inspired by the Cemetery shows compositions from which we can deduce the Cemetery’s precise location in Prague.<sup>34</sup> The earliest such view, from 1840, is by the well-known Bohemian artist Vinzenz Morstadt (1802-1875), who specialized in images of Prague. While the Cemetery in the foreground, one of his compositions opens up beyond the Cemetery to incorporate a rather detailed view of Prague Castle in the background. Similar compositions were particularly popular in the 1850s and 1860s, for example in prints and paintings by Jaroslav Čermák (1830-1878), Bedřich Havránek (1821-1889), Karl B. Post (1834-1877), and Matthias Wehli (1824-1889).<sup>35</sup> They are topographically correct since the view westwards from the Cemetery must include the Castle, but there is no physical requirement to respect this in a painting. We can thus assume that whenever Prague Castle, an image charged with strong national symbolism, appears in a picture of the Cemetery, an incorporative gesture is present. This art raises the status of the Cemetery to one of Prague’s constitutive parts.

### *Comments Have Agendas*

Thus far, much of what has been presented amounts to a chronological list of diverse comments on the Cemetery. We have analyzed them and provided basic contexts, but clearly, the list raises further questions. Why did Gentile authors write about a Jewish cemetery in the first place? Certainly, the Cemetery’s transition from a fully-functional burial place to a place of limited functionality during the onset of early modern tourism made visiting it easier. Moreover, the changing public space made it possible for a Gentile to visit a Jewish cemetery and leave a written trace despite the

<sup>31</sup> Herrmann, Ignát: “Hřbitov” [Cemetery], *ibid.*, 4. In the Czech original: “Den hořel a bílé talířky bezínek kvetoucích vydávaly po všem prostoru pronikavou ostrou vůni; s nimi tu a tam v tom závodil unylý keř jasmínový. Skrze pitoreskní větve leckde na zvětralé kameny židovských hrobů slunečný paprsek šleh zlatem a osvětlil staré hebrejské litery, jimiž psáno sinajské desatero, nejstručnější, nejhlubší Zákoník na světě.”

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. In the Czech original: “[...] na stezičce sedí děti židovské, děvče děvčeti cop rozplétá – zase život.”

<sup>33</sup> An important case of a gendered view of the Cemetery is the short story “Die Hollunderblüte” by the German author Wilhelm Raabe. See Demetz, Peter: Rabbi Loew and his Golem in German Literature. In Putík, Alexandr (ed.): Path of Life – Rabbi Judah Loew Ben Bezalel, 1525-1609. Prague 2009, 293-314.

<sup>34</sup> I am basing this observation on Pařík, Arno: Pražské ghetto v obrazech [Prague Ghetto in Pictures]. Praha 2006, an extensive collection of visual materials, mostly from the nineteenth century.

<sup>35</sup> Matthias Wehli (1824-1889) was probably Jewish.

fact that the visit was not part of his religious practice. Not surprisingly, this greater freedom of movement within the public sphere, which travelogues and related genres were actually encouraging, gave rise to a wide range of descriptions of the Cemetery, resulting in a range of reactions on which Goedsche and Nebeský would represent opposite ends. But a range is just a descriptive device. We are still faced with the initial question: why would a Gentile comment on a non-Gentile cemetery?

Comments are tied to agendas that often serve wider interests. This is quite obvious in Czech commentaries starting with Nebeský. A year after his Rabbi Löw story, he argued in his “A Few Words on the Relation of Jews and Slavs” (1845) that Jews must be won over to the Slavic side: “[W]e must admit that these two million Jews living among us<sup>36</sup> would be a significant gain for us if they leaned on us sincerely and engaged their strength for the goal that we long for.”<sup>37</sup> Nebeský repeatedly draws attention to the success of Jews in Germany and is afraid that “Slavic Jews” might look abroad for such examples of success, i.e. opt for the German side. In other words, his wanderings around the Cemetery are reverential steps into the culture of a potential ally. Nebeský’s project did not materialize, but it represents a distinct voice in the discussion of the status of Jews in the Bohemian *Vormärz*. It amounted to a proposal to grant incorporation in exchange for loyalty – note that the potential Jewish ally is assumed to be “sincere” and to stand for “the goals we [the Czechs] desire.”

This attitude became more widespread towards the end of the century. Svátek reveals an incorporative agenda on the same premise – the exchange of tolerance for loyalty. While he does not explicitly justify the inclusion of Jewish legends in his collection, he is happy to note that a number of old graves at the Cemetery carry Czech names, proving “that the Jews used to consider themselves Czechs at the same time.”<sup>38</sup> He notices names such as Čech, Nezamysl, Sláva, Libuše, Vlk, and others. Jirásek copied this list more or less verbatim, concluding that the gravestones testified to an era “when Jews opted for the Czech nation more frequently.”<sup>39</sup> Other Czech authors joined in by asking the Jews to stand side by side with the Czechs. They include the Czech poet Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853-1912), whose work repeatedly turned to Jewish themes, especially in the 1890s. His poem “At the Old Jewish Cemetery” calls upon the potential Jewish reader to “reach us [the Czechs] your hand for our common work!”<sup>40</sup> Vrchlický’s agenda is comparable with Svátek’s and Jirásek’s; he was another participant in the literary struggle for the Bohemian Jew.

<sup>36</sup> Nebeský speaks as a Slav, and the number of Jews he gives relates to Slavic countries.

<sup>37</sup> Nebeský, V[áclav Bolemlr]: Něco o poměru Slovanů a Židů [A few words about the relation of Slavs and Jews]. In: Květy 11 (1844) 323, 327, 331, 335-336, 338-339; quotation on p. 338. In the Czech original: “[...] musíme se přiznati, žeby tyto 2 miliony mezi nám bydlících Židů byly pro nás znamenitý zisk, kdyby upřímně k nám přilnuli a svou sílu nasadili k tomuto cíli, po kterémž my toužíme.”

<sup>38</sup> Svátek: Pražské pověsti a legendy 22 (cf. fn. 29). In the Czech original: “[...] že se Židé druhdy zároveň též Čechy býti cítili.”

<sup>39</sup> Jirásek, Alois: Staré pověsti české [Old Czech Legends]. Praha 1894; quoted from a reedition Praha 1989, 163.

<sup>40</sup> Vrchlický, Jaroslav: Na starém hřbitově židovském [At the Old Jewish Cemetery]; quoted

Excorporative authors had their agendas as well. The path from Klutschak through Herloßsohn to Goedsche is essentially one of ethnic othering in the guise of the literary *Schauerromantik*. The universalizing trope of the cycle of life is replaced by historicization and excorporation. This is obvious in the case of Goedsche, a Prussian chauvinist who presented the Cemetery as a breeding ground for future threats to Prussia. Goedsche was closely associated with pre-*Kaiserreich* anti-Semitic journalism in Berlin. By contrast, Herloßsohn's agenda is not anti-Semitic in the political sense, but as we have seen above, his is a discourse that echoes the contemporary reasoning that saw Judaism as an obsolete religion that refused to rejoin history. Clearly, this line of reasoning is also excorporative. The question of Klutschak's agenda is interesting. The trope of eeriness is essentially esthetic, whether high or low, but as I argued above, Klutschak's pleasurable horror is strongly ethnicized, asserting the idea of the uncanny ethnic Other; recall his fantasy about the Cemetery as the stage of a nightly "epic" that brings exemplary uncanny Jews to life – the Kabbalists.

The two groups presented above might suggest that German-language authors tended to be excorporative, while Czech-language authors tended to be incorporative. However, this generalization is somewhat weakened by the distance in time between our German and our Czech sources, i.e. between the 1830s/1840s and the 1880s/1890s. German-language authors began to write about the Cemetery mostly in travelogues or tourist contexts at a time when the Czech authors, with the notable exception of Nebeský, showed no special interest in the Cemetery. When they began to do so, they wrote in the service of a strong anti-German agenda that motivated efforts to win the Jews over. As a result, Czech accounts represent a more coherent body of texts than those by German-language authors. But clearly, the Czech agenda was local. On a visit to the Cemetery in 1858, Mary Ann Evans, writing under her pen name George Eliot, left a universalizing note:

The Friedhof is unique – with a wild growth of grass and shrubs and trees and a multitude of quaint tombs in all sorts of positions looking like the fragments of a great building, or as if they had been shaken by an earthquake. We saw a lovely dark eyed Jewish child here, which we were glad to kiss in all its dirt.<sup>41</sup>

These are *bona fide* warm-sounding lines – the author was probably well removed from Bohemian politics.

### Memory

The force exerted by wider agendas raises the question of whether the present analysis can be situated within the context of memory studies. As noted in the literature, memory analyses tend to be dominated by the subject of inquiry and by many descriptive details. Caution is thus called for. In a 1997 article (later included in his study of German *Gedächtniskultur*) Alon Confino wrote:

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from Kalendář česko-židovský 13 (1893-94) 113. In the Czech original: "[...] nám podej ruku ke společnému dílu!"

<sup>41</sup> Harris, Margaret/Johnson, Judith (eds.): The Journals of George Eliot. Cambridge, UK 1998, 305.

There is too often a facile mode of doing cultural history, whereby one picks a historical event or a vehicle of memory, analyzes its representation or how people perceived it over time, and draws conclusions about 'memory' (or 'collective memory').

Confino criticizes this:

Only when linked to historical questions and problems, via methods and theories, can memory be illuminating. [...] [At the center] is the problem of how the term 'memory' can be useful in articulating the connections between the cultural, the social, and the political, between representation and social experience."<sup>42</sup>

Before we address this call for caution, let us first see whether the present investigation has the potential of moving in the direction of memory studies at all. Firstly, does the Old Jewish Cemetery qualify as subject of a memory-based inquiry? The answer seems to be yes. It is a material object with a memory charge, which is not surprising because cemeteries are constituted as such in the first place. As collections of graves they are designed to be sites of memory with all that that implies.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, our documents all reveal emotion in one way or another, which is one of the characteristic properties of a vehicle of collective memory. Thirdly, there is the question of the community that read and responded to these texts. This question is more difficult to answer in precise terms as only a few of our texts have a documented reception. But even so, we can plausibly assume that when Nebeský wrote his Rabbi Löw story, he wrote it for a projected community of readers. Likewise, the Cemetery descriptions embedded in tourist guides imply a readership, a community of interested tourists. Furthermore, collections such as Jirásek's are known to have precipitated an emotional response in their readers. Jirásek's *Old Czech Legends* is a miracle glue that bonded generations of Czech readers through the shared experience of childhood reading.

While all these points provide the basis for a memory study, the presence of visible agendas allows us to give the case more structure than that of a simple list. Indeed, laying agendas bare provides a view of Confino's "connections between the cultural, the social, and the political, between representation and social experience." Agendas such as we have seen reveal historical processes as represented in the public sphere, thus touching on represented nationhood (Czech nationalism), represented ethnicity and religion (anti-Semitism), represented leisure (tourism), and so on. One might, of course, raise objections in the face of the Cemetery's competing and changing representations. But clearly, content-defined continuity is not an essential criterion. The same conditions that license plurality in the public sphere predict the existence of unstable memory, of memory threads that reveal discontinuity and call for constant refocusing. Prague is a prime example of such a situation, and so are its parts. Suffice it to refer here to research that studies the contested nature of Prague's public space as it changed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>44</sup> In a way,

<sup>42</sup> Confino, Alon: *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History*. Chapel Hill, N.C. 2006, 171.

<sup>43</sup> For a nuanced account of ways Jewish cemeteries function, see *Bar-Levav*, Avriel: *We are Where We are Not: The Cemetery in Jewish Culture*. *Jewish Studies* 41 (2002) 15-46.

<sup>44</sup> See Nekula on "Slavicizing" Prague by way of monuments and public events (*Nekula*,

represented Prague amounts to a super-agenda with conflicting, if not “non-Euclidean,” properties – (too) many opinions may hold over time (or even at the same time), (too) many graves of memory may be layered one over another. With the desire, and possibility, of discourse participants to re-narrate and reclaim these threads against the background of changing agendas, memory inevitably transforms itself – which might also help explain the various factors making a Jewish cemetery a site of Gentile memory.

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Marek: Hankův pohřeb a idea českého slavína: přebírání a dominance veřejného prostoru českými národními symboly [Hanka's funeral and the idea of a Slavic Pantheon: appropriation and domination of the public space by Czech national symbols]. In: *Pražský sborník historický* 37 (2009) 149-194. – *Nekula*, Marek: Die nationale Kodierung des öffentlichen Raumes in Prag. In: *Becher*, Peter/*Knechtel*, Anna (eds.): *Praha – Prag, 1900-1945. Literaturstadt zweier Sprachen*. Passau 2010, 63-88). – Further see *Paces* on the socio-political history of Prague's monuments: *Paces*, Cynthia: *Prague Panoramas. National Memory and Sacred Space in the Twentieth Century*. Pittsburgh, PA 2009).